



Reflecting on the inside of church buildings

The insides of churches vary greatly, but they also have many similarities. They often have a sense of having been prayed in for many centuries and a stillness and peace that can be comforting or challenging. They provide a place of refuge and comfort as well as being threatening and raising questions.

Allow your children the space with these reflections to be challenged and comforted and to raise their own questions.

You could use this...

- Before visiting a church to anticipate what you will see and feel
- Before a topic on churches to explore children's responses

Bible passages

- Luke 2:41-51 Jesus in the temple as a boy
- John 2:13-16 Jesus overturns the tables in the temple (as a contrast to modern churches)



Watch the whole slide show

It may be appropriate to show all the photos a few times, with a fresh question for each showing. Allow time between showings for children to adjust to the new question.

- Which church would you like to go to for some quiet time on your own?
- Which church would you choose for a celebration event?
- Which churches attract you? What is it that attracts you? Is it the simplicity or busyness, the modern buildings or more traditional, the sense of space or the intimacy, the known or the unknown?
- When you look at the churches, what words come into your head?
- How do you respond to the buildings? What are you thinking and feeling inside?
- How would you like to express your response to these buildings?
- What is it about these buildings that makes you know they are churches?
- What do these buildings say about God?
- Which of these would have been here 100 years ago? 500 years ago? How would they have been different then?

Show one photograph

Choose a photograph that evokes a response in you rather than one that you think will bring out a certain response in the children. If you are using several questions, allow plenty of time between them so the children don't feel rushed.

Coming quietly on your own

- What would it be like to come here quietly, alone?
- Spend some time before the photograph, quietly sitting in the church. Enjoy the peace and stillness.
- Who would you like to meet here?

In church with others

- What would it be like to come here with many other people? Where would you sit? Why would you sit there?
- What would it be like to belong here? How would you know that you did belong?

The church in the past

- Imagine what this church would have looked like 100 years ago. What about 300 or 600 years ago?
- Imagine the day the stained glass window behind the altar was installed. What difference would it have made to the church? How would it have felt? What conversations would have gone on in the church that week?

People in church this week

- Who do you think is about to come into the building? Why are they coming? It might be to pray, prepare the church for the next service, clean . . . How might they be feeling? What might they be thinking?
- What is going to happen next in this church? Will it be a celebration, or a time for sharing sadness? Who will be coming?
- What has happened here in the last week?

Responding to the church

- When you look at this church how do you feel? What does it make you want to do? How would you like to express your response to this place?
- Where in the building do you want to go? Do you want to touch, or just look? Do you want to dance or sing? Do you want to write or draw? Or do you want to be quiet and still?
- What in the picture attracts you and draws you?
- What words come into your head as you look at this building?

Listen to the building

- What in this building makes you go 'wow'?
- What questions does this raise in you?
- What does this building say to you about God?
- What would you change about this building?
- What is it about this building that makes you know that it is a church?

Imagine

Show one of the photographs of the inside of a church, or you could use a photograph of your local church.

Ask the children to imagine standing where the photographer was standing when they took the photograph.

What can you hear?

What can you smell?

How does it feel to be standing there?

Spend some time looking around. What attracts you? What do you dislike?

When you are ready, go and sit down in one of the seats. Notice the stillness and the silence. In the silence, what do you hear?

In silence our minds and hearts find space and often we find we can hear our own thoughts and feelings better than in the busyness of everyday. Become aware of your thoughts and feelings.

How do you want to respond in this space? It might be dancing or singing or walking around, or just sitting or kneeling in the stillness. Imagine doing this.

When you are ready, take a last look round, leave the church and come back to this room where we are sitting. What do you bring with you from the church?



Imagine (for church schools)

Show one of the photographs of the inside of a church, or you could use a photograph of your local church.

Ask the children to imagine standing where the photographer was standing when they took the photograph.

What can you hear?

What can you smell?

How does it feel to be standing there?

Spend some time looking around. What attracts you? What do you dislike?

Sit down. Where do you sit?

What are you thinking?

In the stillness, imagine Jesus comes and sits next to you. What do you say to him? What does he say to you? Spend some time with Jesus in his father's house. You might talk about things at home or at school that you want to share, or you might tell him your response to this church, or you might just be quiet together.

When you are ready, Jesus invites you to the altar. Kneel there. What do you want to thank God for? Offer your thanks to him.

When you are ready, leave, taking a last look before you go out and return to this room where we are sitting. What do you bring with you from this encounter?



Reflecting on church buildings

These reflections are designed to encourage children to think about and to approach aspects of church buildings from a different perspective. Each gives a series of questions to encourage children's thinking, followed by a longer imaginative exercise, in which they are invited to imagine being in the picture and often have an imaginary conversation with someone about some aspect of the church building. In this they are encouraged to notice how they feel about the building and to see it from a different viewpoint. Many of the questions will fit in well in the 'Learning from religion' strand of the RE syllabus and give opportunities for reflecting and considering. They will also work well in PSHE sessions. Suggestions have been given for times when some of the reflections might be particularly relevant for the children, or appropriate for their learning.

You may choose to show the entire slide show and give the pupils one question to think about as they watch. Or the photographs could be printed out and paper copies displayed for children to use, or as the focus on a display using some of the questions the children have been exploring. You could show the slide show more than once, posing a different question with each showing. Sometimes the questions follow on from each other, others are unconnected.

Rather than showing the series of photographs in the slide show, you could choose one photograph (or use a photo of a similar feature in your local church) and choose a few questions from one section to ask the children. If you visit a church you could use the reflection as part of your session in the church and use the real objects as the focus rather than the photographs.

If pupils are not used to working in this way, you may need to give them some pointers first, or model your thoughts, but emphasise that there is no 'right' answer to the questions, and that their experience is valuable, even if it is completely different to anyone else's. It is a space for their personal reflections.

Some sections will be more appropriate for use in church schools. Use your judgement on which is suitable for your school context and your pupils.

After the reflection allow children the opportunity to share something of what they were thinking about if they want to, but also give them permission not to share it. For some pupils deep issues might be raised and they might prefer to talk to you or another member of staff about this quietly later.

The reflections could be used alongside a story for collective worship, and Bible references are given for related passages you might include.