

Understanding Humanism: core knowledge (ages 5-14)

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Introduction

This document sets out the core substantive knowledge about humanism that students should learn from ages 5-14. This will help them to develop a sound understanding of an example of a non-religious worldview as part of a rich and inclusive education about religion and worldviews.

The resources on understandinghumanism.org.uk are divided into **five core areas of knowledge**.

- 1) Human beings (human evolution, nature, and potential)
- 2) Understanding the world (science and reason)
- 3) The one life (freedom and happiness)
- 4) Humanist ethics (empathy and the impact of our actions)
- 5) Society (actions, goals, and responsibility)

Below you will find the core knowledge students should learn within each of these areas at each age range. This identifies the key features of a humanist approach to life that they should encounter and understand. Students should be able to apply this knowledge in the following ways:

- identify the beliefs, values, and goals typically shared by humanists;
- describe the core features of a humanist approach to life (e.g. how humanists understand the world, how they make decisions about the best way to act);
- assess the likely perspective a humanist might take on particular questions;
- consider the influence of humanism on the modern world; and
- evaluate the claims a humanist might make.

Students should have the opportunity to reflect on the humanist approach, to respond to it critically and creatively, and to consider similarities to, and differences from, their own and other worldviews.

The core knowledge has been sequenced across the age ranges (for ages 5-14) to ensure that each stage expands on the previous, building on students' prior knowledge, in order to provide a coherent narrative. Sometimes the core knowledge will be repeated in more than one age range. It will need to be covered at an age-appropriate level of depth. The resources available on understandinghumanism.org.uk will help with this. If you are aware that students have not encountered the core knowledge at an earlier age range, then work may need to be done to develop their understanding of that knowledge before moving on.

Students aged 14 and above should have the opportunity to build on this knowledge by digging more deeply into the concepts and exploring the ways humanists approach the topics and questions encountered in the Religious Studies GCSE and A level. A sound understanding of the core knowledge will support students to consider how humanists might approach contemporary ethical debates (e.g. assisted dying, war, animal welfare). It should also open up opportunities to explore the impact and influence of humanism on the modern world.

We have also included information on core knowledge about atheism and agnosticism. This is important knowledge for students to learn as part of their education about religion and worldviews and should be covered within a school's syllabus. However, it is not the most valuable thing to devote time to when learning about humanism. While it is important for students to know that humanists

will be atheist or agnostic on the question of gods, it is of greater value to focus the majority of teaching time on the things humanists do believe in.

Resources

Resources are available on understandinghumanism.org.uk to support the teaching of the core knowledge. Teachers can also find a [How to use guide](#) that provides information on the different types of resources and how to use them.

The core knowledge only focuses on the core features of a humanist approach to life. Resources on other areas of knowledge are also available on Understanding Humanism to support teachers and students with the time to dig deeper. These include resources on humanist history, how many humanists there are, organised humanism, humanist ceremonies, the lives of humanists around the world, and how people discover humanism.

How to use this information

The content of this document has been designed to support teachers, schools, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs), and Agreed Syllabus Conferences (ASCs) to plan their teaching or to integrate humanism into a syllabus or scheme of work.

The aim is not to present a case for how an education about religion and worldviews should be delivered. This is a guide to the core knowledge required for students to develop a sound understanding of humanism. The knowledge could be taught systematically, through a term's focus on humanism as an example of a non-religious worldview, or more thematically using perspectives from humanism to inform a wider study of topics such as beliefs, life and death, ethics, or goals for society.

The core knowledge below has been organised in two different ways as different users may prefer the information displayed in different formats. First, it has been divided into each key area of knowledge and then broken down across the age ranges, and second, it has been organised by age range and then broken down by area of knowledge.

Things to be aware of

Differences to religions

It is important to note that the study of humanism will often differ from the study of religions. It is a worldview without a holy text or founding figure, with no festivals, compulsory rituals, places or objects of worship, prayers, hymns, or structures of authority. What humanism shares with many religions is that it is an approach to life's big questions and a way of understanding the world and our place in it that has an impact on how people choose to live.

Descriptive not prescriptive

It is important that the beliefs and values in the core knowledge are not presented as a doctrine or creed that humanists must sign up to, or a set of instructions on how a humanist must behave. Instead, they describe the typical beliefs and values held, and the approach to life taken by humanists. It is perhaps more appropriate to understand ‘humanist’ as a descriptive label that can be applied to those who adopt such an approach to life. There are people who hold these beliefs, values, and goals, and the word ‘humanist’ can be used to describe them.

In that sense, the word operates differently from many religious labels. A Christian, Muslim, or Hindu will normally adopt the label (or be labelled) as (or before) they develop the associated beliefs and practices. In contrast, a humanist will typically discover the label after (sometimes long after) they have already formed the associated beliefs. There is no compulsion to self-identify. While around 5% of the UK population adopt the label ‘humanist’, many more will hold a humanist worldview, but will not use the word to describe themselves.¹

Aspirations and reality

It is important to note that where we say something is a feature of a humanist approach to life (e.g. treating other people the way we would like to be treated) this is not to claim that all humanists will act this way all of the time. Humanists, like all people, often fail to act in ways that cohere with the things they say they believe, or to live out their values. What we have tried to provide are the features of an approach to life that many humanists say they aspire to, whether or not that approach is lived out in reality. Exploring the lived reality of humanists is an important part of an education about worldviews too.

Diversity

Humanists are not all the same. We have tried to focus on the beliefs, values, and goals where you will typically find a large amount of agreement between humanists and humanist organisations. However, there may be disagreements on the level of conviction, priorities, and approach. For example, while humanists will generally agree that it is possible to lead good, happy, and meaningful lives without religion, there will be differences of opinion on how this can best be done. There is no one single humanist way to live. We have tried to include individual voices. However, none speak for all humanists.

Sometimes a little simplification is necessary to introduce new ideas and concepts to younger students to better prepare them to make sense of the more complicated reality later. However, it should be made clear to students that, like in all worldviews, there is diversity within humanism. As students develop their understanding, their learning about the core features of a humanist approach to life should be combined with learning about the messier reality of religion and belief.

Understanding Humanism does not pretend to present the final word on humanism. Humanism is an ongoing conversation. It is an approach to life open to change as we develop our understanding of the world around us, human nature, and what supports the wellbeing of sentient life.

¹ YouGov (2017) ‘New poll shows one in five are humanists’ in humanism.org.uk/2017/06/15/new-poll-shows-one-in-five-are-humanists-and-a-third-hold-humanist-beliefs/

Overview: five common features of a humanist approach to life

1) Humanists believe that human beings have natural origins. We **evolved** naturally like all other living things. We have evolved many capacities and, if we put them to good use, we have the **potential** to lead good and happy lives.

2) Humanists believe the world is a **natural** place with no supernatural side (they will be atheists or agnostics). They believe that **science** and the search for **evidence** provides the best way to answer our questions about the world.

3) Humanists believe this is the **one life** we have and so we need to make the most of it. For humanists, there is no single 'ultimate' meaning of life. Instead, it is up to us to make our own lives **meaningful**. They believe we should be **free** to decide how we live (as long as we do not cause harm to others), seeking **happiness** and supporting others to do the same.

4) Humanists believe that the origins of our moral capacities lie inside human beings and our evolution as social animals. They believe that, when deciding how to act, we should use reason and **empathy**, considering the consequences of our actions and the likely impact on other people and animals.

5) Humanists believe that human beings alone are **responsible** for making the world a better place. Many campaign for equality, human rights, and secularism. Many celebrate the progress humanity has made, but recognise the work that is still to be done.

Core knowledge organised by area of knowledge

The core knowledge is in **bold** with supplementary knowledge below.

Human beings Big question: What am I?	Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist understanding of human beings .		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder	Belief in the scientific story of where we came from <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief the universe is a natural place and that it started with the Big Bang • Looking for natural explanations for our origins • The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	Recognising that human beings have good and bad features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief human beings evolved like all other living things (we are animals, we were not created) • Recognising both our good and bad feelings, instincts, and behaviours 	Believing that human beings can help to make the world a better place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The responsibility to make the most of our potential and encourage other people to do the same • Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements
Age 7-11 Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder	Looking to science for natural explanations of our origins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific explanations for our origins (the Big Bang theory, evolution by natural selection) • The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	Recognising that human beings evolved positive and negative qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans as evolved animals • The belief we are made from matter (atoms) and have no disembodied spirit or soul • The belief this is the one life we have • Recognising our naturally evolved positive and negative instincts and capacities 	Believing that human beings have the potential to make the world a better place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief our capacities give rise to responsibilities • Recognising our flaws and working to limit them where we can • Trying to make the most of our potential and encouraging other people to do the same • Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements

Age 11-14 Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, mortality, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder	Looking to science for natural explanations of our origins <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scientific explanations for our origins (the Big Bang theory, evolution by natural selection) The pursuit of natural explanations as answers to our questions The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	Recognising that human beings evolved positive and negative qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humans as evolved animals The belief we are made from matter (atoms) and have no disembodied spirit or soul The belief we are mortal - this is the one life we have Recognising our naturally evolved positive and negative instincts and capacities (e.g. empathy, reason, imagination) 	Believing that human beings have the potential to make the world a better place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief our capacities give rise to responsibilities (considering options, imagining alternatives, and making choices) Adopting a scientific but cautiously optimistic understanding of human beings Recognising our flaws and working to limit them where we can Trying to make the most of our potential and encouraging other people to do the same Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements
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Understanding the world Big question: How can I know what is true?	Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to understanding the world.		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, potential, support, freedom, humanist naming ceremony	Asking questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that one of the things that is special about human beings is our ability to ask questions Asking questions as a way to learn more about the world and to help to make our lives better Curiosity as one of life's great pleasures 	Looking for evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not simply believing everything we are told Thinking carefully for ourselves The recognition that people sometimes make mistakes Being allowed to disagree 	Believing the world is a natural place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces The absence of belief in a god The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)

<p>Age 7-11</p> <p>Key vocab: curiosity, responsibility, evidence, science, progress, natural, atheist</p>	<p>Recognising our beliefs can be mistaken and being prepared to question them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition that our beliefs can be true or false • Recognising the different reasons why we believe things and why they are open to error • The responsibility to ask questions, think carefully, and look closely at the evidence • Being willing to adapt or change beliefs when faced with new evidence 	<p>Believing science provides the best way of answering questions about the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science as a process that asks questions and allows us to test claims • Being wary of claims that have no scientific evidence or can't be tested • Science as a process that sometimes makes mistakes but is able to check its results • Science as a source of progress in our understanding • Curiosity as a pleasure and science as a source of wonder 	<p>Believing that the world is a natural place, and looking for natural explanations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god due to the absence of persuasive evidence • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)
<p>Age 11-14</p> <p>Key vocab: scepticism, curiosity, responsibility, evidence, science, progress, natural, atheist</p>	<p>Adopting a sceptical approach to the search for knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition that our beliefs can be true or false and that we can be mistaken • Allowing our beliefs to be open to question • The responsibility to use reason and to look for evidence • Being willing to adapt or change beliefs when faced with new evidence • Being patient and comfortable with uncertainty 	<p>Believing science provides the best way of answering questions about the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science as a process that asks questions and allows us to test claims • Being wary of claims that have no scientific evidence or can't be tested (e.g. claims based solely on faith or revelation) • Science as a process that sometimes makes mistakes but is self-correcting • Science as a source of progress in our understanding • Philosophy as a means of approaching questions that science can't answer • Curiosity as a pleasure and science as a source of wonder 	<p>Believing that the world is a natural place and looking for natural explanations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god due to the absence of persuasive evidence • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)

The one life Big question: How should I live?	Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to living a happy life .		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, potential, support, freedom, humanist naming ceremony	The Happy Human as a symbol of humanism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Happy Human represents a celebration of being human and our human potential The Happy Human is used by humanist organisations all around the world 	The belief there are many different ways to be happy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The importance of finding happiness in the here and now The belief that there is no one single way to be happy – people are different 	The belief that everyone should be free to find what makes them happy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being free to do what we want as long as we do not harm other people or animals Supporting other people to find happiness The focus at a humanist naming ceremony on a child's freedom to find their own path in life and the responsibility of other people to support them
Age 7-11 Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, support, freedom, personal autonomy, responsibility, tolerance, equality, diversity	The belief we have one life and we should make the most of it <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that finding happiness is one of the most important things in life – the time to be happy is now The belief there is no one single way to be happy – people are different Supporting other people to find happiness (doing this can also make us happy) The Happy Human as a symbol of humanism 	The belief that everyone should have the freedom to pursue what makes them happy, as long as they cause no harm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being free to make our own choices in life about what we believe and how we live The responsibility to think carefully about our choices and the consequences of our actions Being the authors of our own lives Finding happiness in relationships, creativity, curiosity, achieving our goals, and making other people happy 	Being tolerant of those whose choices are different from our own <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrating the diverse ways people can find happiness Recognising not everyone is happy, and trying to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to find happiness in the here and now The focus at humanist ceremonies on freedom, the importance of connections with others, and living a happy life

<p>Age 11-14</p> <p>Key vocab: mortality, the one life, meaning, happiness, connections, wonder, freedom, personal autonomy, responsibility, tolerance, equality, diversity</p>	<p>The belief we have one life and it is up to us to make the most of it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief we are mortal • Potential positive consequences of accepting this is the one life we have on how we live • Recognising that our atoms, genes, ideas, works, and contributions to society can survive our deaths • The memories of someone who has died, and the impact they had on our lives, as sources of comfort and joy • Humanist funerals as an occasion for the living to grieve, to share memories, and to celebrate the life of the person who has died 	<p>The absence of belief in an ‘ultimate’ external meaning to life, but the capacity to make our own lives meaningful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making life meaningful by seeking happiness in the here and now and supporting others to do the same • The belief there is no one single answer to what makes a happy or meaningful life • Finding meaning in connections, creativity, curiosity, achieving our goals, and making the world a better place • Feeling connected to something bigger than ourselves – a community, human history, and the natural world • Finding wonder in the natural world, the human story, science, and art 	<p>Believing that everyone should have the freedom to pursue what makes them happy, as long as they cause no harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting personal autonomy – the freedom to make choices in life about what we believe and how we live • Being the authors of our own lives • The responsibility to think carefully about our choices and the consequences of our actions • Being tolerant of different people’s lifestyle choices • Celebrating the diverse ways people can find happiness • Trying to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to find happiness in the here and now
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Humanist ethics Big question: How can I know what is good?	Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to ethics .		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: happiness, consequences, empathy, the Golden Rule	Trying to be kind to other people, animals, and the planet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising that we all want to be happy – none of us wants to be harmed Being kind as a way to make the world a better place to live The belief that being good can make us happy Recognising that most people are good to each other most of the time 	Thinking carefully about how other people might feel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding that rules can be helpful, but believing that we also need to think about the consequences of our actions Trying to support happiness and reduce suffering Empathy as the capacity to imagine how other people might feel 	Treating other people the way we would like to be treated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Golden Rule as a way to think about how we should treat other people Recognising that being good can sometimes persuade other people to be good too – everyone benefits
Age 7-11 Key vocab: consequences, empathy, the Golden Rule, responsibility	Believing the reason to be good is because our actions have an impact on others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that rewards and punishment are not the only reason to be good The belief that being good is about promoting happiness and wellbeing, and reducing suffering in the here and now Being good as a way to make the world a better place to live The belief that being good can make us happy Recognising that being good can sometimes persuade other people to be good too – everyone benefits 	Thinking for ourselves about what we should do and considering the consequences of our actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising that rules and guidance can be helpful but unquestionable rules can create problems Taking responsibility for our own choices and actions The belief we can be good without the need for a god or religion – we have the right natural capacities Considering the impact of our action on other people, animals, and the planet 	Using empathy and the Golden Rule to help us decide how we should act <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagining how other people might feel Treating other people the way we would like to be treated Believing that a recognition of our shared needs and values can help us think about how to treat each other Recognising that empathy evolved naturally from the fact that we are social animals who live in communities The belief that hearing stories about other people can help to develop empathy

Age 11-14 Key vocab: welfare, flourishing, shared values, consequences, reason, empathy, the Golden Rule, responsibility, evolution, social animal, instincts	Believing that the origins of morality lie inside human beings	Aiming to improve human welfare and happiness in the here and now	Thinking for ourselves about how to act, using empathy and reason
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognising that many animals display altruistic behaviour ● Recognising that empathy evolved naturally from our nature as social animals who live in communities ● Recognising we have also evolved less friendly instincts ● Understanding that biology does not tell us how we should act, but it can help explain the origins of our moral instincts and capacities ● The belief that we don't need to believe in a god to be good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The absence of belief that morality is about doing what some agent outside humanity wants of us – instead believing it is about our responsibilities to other people ● Rejecting the claim that right and wrong are just a matter of personal preference ● Recognising that we have evolved many shared needs and values, and these help us to think about how we should treat each other and to decide which outcomes are better than others ● Considering the wellbeing and suffering of all human beings, and other animals ● Recognising that moral dilemmas arise when our values come into conflict with each other ● The belief that life is happier, fuller, and richer when we are good to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognising that rules can sometimes be helpful but unquestionable rules can create problems ● Considering the consequences of our actions ● Taking responsibility for our own choices and actions ● Recognising that reason doesn't give us the answers to moral questions but it can help us to assess the evidence and be consistent ● Treating other people the way we would like to be treated (the Golden Rule) ● The belief that hearing stories about other people can help to broaden our empathy

Society Big question: What kind of world do I want?	Knowledge outcomes: Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to building a healthy society .		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: achievements, shared needs, freedom, fairness, kindness, responsibility	Valuing our human achievements	Promoting freedom, fairness, and kindness	Taking responsibility for making the world a better place
Age 7-11 Key vocab: solidarity, shared needs, equality, responsibility, freedom, fairness, kindness, human rights, action	Believing that human beings share many needs and feelings	Taking responsibility for building a better world	Promoting freedom, fairness, and kindness
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising that human beings have built and created many things that have improved our lives The absence of any places of worship for humanists Finding value in buildings and spaces that help support happiness, health, education, and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that human beings share many needs, desires, and feelings The belief that everyone should have freedom of belief and choice over how they live Treating everybody equally Trying to treat other people with warmth and respect, and trying to live together peacefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that we need to take action, rather than just hope for change The belief that it is up to human beings to make the world a better place (help won't come from elsewhere) Recognising that our actions can make a difference, even if it is only in a small way The belief that what we do can influence others
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that human solidarity can help bring us closer together The belief that what we share is greater than that which divides us Treating people equally, not differently according to gender, race, nationality, sexuality, disabilities, or religion or belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that human beings alone are responsible for improving the quality of our lives (help won't come from elsewhere) The absence of belief that wrongs will be put right in some future life, and the need to work for fairness and happiness in the here and now Recognising the progress we have made towards a fairer and better world, but that there is still much work to be done Taking practical action to make the world a better place, believing each of us can contribute in some way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief that our shared needs, desires, and feelings can help us to see what kind of goals we should work for Supporting human rights as a way to support human freedoms and equality Trying to treat other people with warmth and respect, and trying to live together peacefully

Age 11-14 Key vocab: plural society, veil of ignorance, freedom, equality, justice, human rights, secularism, freedom of belief, responsibility, campaigning, progress	Promoting freedom, equality, and human rights	Supporting secularism and believing it benefits individuals and society	Believing that human beings alone are responsible for making the world a better place
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognising a plural society as one in which there live people from different backgrounds, cultures, and traditions, with a range of worldviews ● Believing that human beings share many needs and feelings ● The veil of ignorance as a way to help us think about what would make a fair society and the work that needs to be done (the case for individual freedom and equality of opportunity) ● The belief that human rights are based on our universal human needs and are designed to guarantee us all the freedom to live our lives the way we wish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Misconceptions about secularism (it is not atheism) ● Secularism as a position that advocates separation of church and state, freedom of belief, and equal treatment of all ● The belief that secularism supports freedom, fairness, and peace ● Humanists will typically be secularists, but so will many religious people ● The UK is not a secular state ● Secularism is under threat in many parts of the world ● In many countries, people are not free to be non-religious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The belief that help won't come from outside humanity ● The absence of belief that wrongs will be put right in some future life, and the need to work for justice in the here and now ● How individual humanists' concerns often stretch beyond the work of humanist organisations (humanists can be found campaigning for human welfare, peace, education, and the protection of the environment, and against poverty and injustice) ● Recognising the significant progress we have made towards a fairer and better world, but that there is still much work to be done

Core knowledge organised by age range

The core knowledge is in **bold** with supplementary knowledge below.

Age 5-7			
<p>Human beings</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist understanding of human beings.</p> <p>Big question: What am I?</p> <p>Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder</p>	<p>Belief in the scientific story of where we came from</p>	<p>Recognising that human beings have good and bad features</p>	<p>Believing that human beings can help to make the world a better place</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief the universe is a natural place and that it started with the Big Bang • Looking for natural explanations for our origins • The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief human beings evolved like all other living things (we are animals, we were not created) • Recognising both our good and bad feelings, instincts, and behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The responsibility to make the most of our potential and encourage other people to do the same • Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements

<p>Understanding the world</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to understanding the world.</p> <p>Big question: How can I know what is true?</p> <p>Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, potential, support, freedom, humanist naming ceremony</p>	<p>Asking questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that one of the things that is special about human beings is our ability to ask questions • Asking questions as a way to learn more about the world and to help to make our lives better • Curiosity as one of life's great pleasures 	<p>Looking for evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not simply believing everything we are told • Thinking carefully for ourselves • The recognition that people sometimes make mistakes • Being allowed to disagree 	<p>Believing the world is a natural place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)
<p>The one life</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to living a happy life.</p> <p>Big question: How should I live?</p> <p>Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, potential, support, freedom, humanist naming ceremony</p>	<p>The Happy Human as a symbol of humanism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Happy Human represents a celebration of being human and our human potential • The Happy Human is used by humanist organisations all around the world 	<p>The belief there are many different ways to be happy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of finding happiness in the here and now • The belief that there is no one single way to be happy – people are different 	<p>The belief that everyone should be free to find what makes them happy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being free to do what we want as long as we do not harm other people or animals • Supporting other people to find happiness • The focus at a humanist naming ceremony on a child's freedom to find their own path in life and the responsibility of other people to support them

<p>Humanist ethics</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to ethics.</p> <p>Big question: How can I know what is good?</p> <p>Key vocab: happiness, consequences, empathy, the Golden Rule</p>	<p>Trying to be kind to other people, animals, and the planet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that we all want to be happy – none of us wants to be harmed • Being kind as a way to make the world a better place to live • The belief that being good can make us happy • Recognising that most people are good to each other most of the time 	<p>Thinking carefully about how other people might feel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding that rules can be helpful, but believing that we also need to think about the consequences of our actions • Trying to support happiness and reduce suffering • Empathy as the capacity to imagine how other people might feel 	<p>Treating other people the way we would like to be treated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Golden Rule as a way to think about how we should treat other people • Recognising that being good can sometimes persuade other people to be good too – everyone benefits
<p>Society</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to building a healthy society.</p> <p>Big question: What kind of world do I want?</p> <p>Key vocab: achievements, shared needs, freedom, fairness, kindness, responsibility</p>	<p>Valuing our human achievements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that human beings have built and created many things that have improved our lives • The absence of any places of worship for humanists • Finding value in buildings and spaces that help support happiness, health, education, and community 	<p>Promoting freedom, fairness, and kindness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that human beings share many needs, desires, and feelings • The belief that everyone should have freedom of belief and choice over how they live • Treating everybody equally • Trying to treat other people with warmth and respect, and trying to live together peacefully 	<p>Taking responsibility for making the world a better place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that we need to take action, rather than just hope for change • The belief that it is up to human beings to make the world a better place (help won't come from elsewhere) • Recognising that our actions can make a difference, even if it is only in a small way • The belief that what we do can influence others

Age 7-11				
<p>Human beings</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist understanding of human beings.</p> <p>Big question: What am I?</p> <p>Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder</p>	<p>Looking to science for natural explanations of our origins</p>	<p>Recognising that human beings evolved positive and negative qualities</p>	<p>Believing that human beings have the potential to make the world a better place</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific explanations for our origins (the Big Bang theory, evolution by natural selection) • The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans as evolved animals • The belief we are made from matter (atoms) and have no disembodied spirit or soul • The belief this is the one life we have • Recognising our naturally evolved positive and negative instincts and capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief our capacities give rise to responsibilities • Recognising our flaws and working to limit them where we can • Trying to make the most of our potential and encouraging other people to do the same • Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements 	
<p>Understanding the world</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to understanding the world.</p> <p>Big question: How can I know what is true?</p> <p>Key vocab: curiosity, responsibility, evidence, science, progress, natural, atheist</p>	<p>Recognising our beliefs can be mistaken and being prepared to question them</p>	<p>Believing science provides the best way of answering questions about the world</p>	<p>Believing that the world is a natural place, and looking for natural explanations</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition that our beliefs can be true or false • Recognising the different reasons why we believe things and why they are open to error • The responsibility to ask questions, think carefully, and look closely at the evidence • Being willing to adapt or change beliefs when faced with new evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science as a process that asks questions and allows us to test claims • Being wary of claims that have no scientific evidence or can't be tested • Science as a process that sometimes makes mistakes but is able to check its results • Science as a source of progress in our understanding • Curiosity as a pleasure and science as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god due to the absence of persuasive evidence • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship) 	

<p>The one life</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to living a happy life.</p> <p>Big question: How should I live?</p> <p>Key vocab: happiness, the Happy Human, support, freedom, personal autonomy, responsibility, tolerance, equality, diversity</p>	<p>The belief we have one life and we should make the most of it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that finding happiness is one of the most important things in life – the time to be happy is now • The belief there is no one single way to be happy – people are different • Supporting other people to find happiness (doing this can also make us happy) • The Happy Human as a symbol of humanism 	<p>The belief that everyone should have the freedom to pursue what makes them happy, as long as they cause no harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being free to make our own choices in life about what we believe and how we live • The responsibility to think carefully about our choices and the consequences of our actions • Being the authors of our own lives • Finding happiness in relationships, creativity, curiosity, achieving our goals, and making other people happy 	<p>Being tolerant of those whose choices are different from our own</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating the diverse ways people can find happiness • Recognising not everyone is happy, and trying to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to find happiness in the here and now • The focus at humanist ceremonies on freedom, the importance of connections with others, and living a happy life
<p>Humanist ethics</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to ethics.</p> <p>Big question: How can I know what is good?</p> <p>Key vocab: consequences, empathy, the Golden Rule, responsibility</p>	<p>Believing the reason to be good is because our actions have an impact on others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that rewards and punishment are not the only reason to be good • The belief that being good is about promoting happiness and wellbeing, and reducing suffering in the here and now • Being good as a way to make the world a better place to live • The belief that being good can make us happy • Recognising that being good can sometimes persuade other people to be good too – everyone benefits 	<p>Thinking for ourselves about what we should do and considering the consequences of our actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that rules and guidance can be helpful but unquestionable rules can create problems • Taking responsibility for our own choices and actions • The belief we can be good without the need for a god or religion – we have the right natural capacities • Considering the impact of our action on other people, animals, and the planet 	<p>Using empathy and the Golden Rule to help us decide how we should act</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining how other people might feel • Treating other people the way we would like to be treated • Believing that a recognition of our shared needs and values can help us think about how to treat each other • Recognising that empathy evolved naturally from the fact that we are social animals who live in communities • The belief that hearing stories about other people can help to develop empathy

Society	Believing that human being share many needs, and feelings	Taking responsibility for building a better world	Promoting freedom, fairness, and kindness
<p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to building a healthy society.</p> <p>Big question: What kind of world do I want?</p> <p>Key vocab: solidarity, shared needs, equality, responsibility, freedom, fairness, kindness, human rights, action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that human solidarity can help bring us closer together • The belief that what we share is greater than that which divides us • Treating people equally, not differently according to gender, race, nationality, sexuality, disabilities, or religion or belief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that human beings alone are responsible for improving the quality of our lives (help won't come from elsewhere) • The absence of belief that wrongs will be put right in some future life, and the need to work for fairness and happiness in the here and now • Recognising the progress we have made towards a fairer and better world, but that there is still much work to be done • Taking practical action to make the world a better place, believing each of us can contribute in some way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that our shared needs, desires, and feelings can help us to see what kind of goals we should work for • Supporting human rights as a way to support human freedoms and equality • Trying to treat other people with warmth and respect, and trying to live together peacefully

Age 11-14			
Human beings Students should know about the following common features of a humanist understanding of human beings. Big question: What am I? Key vocab: natural, the Big Bang, evolution, mortality, celebrate, responsibility, potential, wonder	Looking to science for natural explanations of our origins	Recognising that human beings evolved positive and negative qualities	Believing that human beings have the potential to make the world a better place
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific explanations for our origins (the Big Bang theory, evolution by natural selection) • The pursuit of natural explanations as answers to our questions • The scientific story of our origins as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humans as evolved animals • The belief we are made from matter (atoms) and have no disembodied spirit or soul • The belief we are mortal - this is the one life we have • Recognising our naturally evolved positive and negative instincts and capacities (e.g. empathy, reason, imagination) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief our capacities give rise to responsibilities (considering options, imagining alternatives, and making choices) • Adopting a scientific but cautiously optimistic understanding of human beings • Recognising our flaws and working to limit them where we can • Trying to make the most of our potential and encouraging other people to do the same • Celebrating our abilities and many of our achievements
Understanding the world Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to understanding the world. Big question: How can I know what is true? Key vocab: scepticism, curiosity, responsibility, evidence, science, progress, natural, atheist	Adopting a sceptical approach to the search for knowledge	Believing science provides the best way of answering questions about the world	Believing that the world is a natural place and looking for natural explanations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition that our beliefs can be true or false and that we can be mistaken • Allowing our beliefs to be open to question • The responsibility to use reason and to look for evidence • Being willing to adapt or change beliefs when faced with new evidence • Being patient and comfortable with uncertainty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science as a process that asks questions and allows us to test claims • Being wary of claims that have no scientific evidence or can't be tested (e.g. claims based solely on faith or revelation) • Science as a process that sometimes makes mistakes but is self-correcting • Science as a source of progress in our understanding • Philosophy as a means of approaching questions that science can't answer • Curiosity as a pleasure and science as a source of wonder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief in supernatural beings or forces • The absence of belief in a god due to the absence of persuasive evidence • The word for someone who does not believe in a god is 'atheist' • Supporting freedom of belief (and not allowing different beliefs to get in the way of friendship)

<p>The one life</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to living a happy life.</p> <p>Big question: How should I live?</p> <p>Key vocab: mortality, the one life, meaning, happiness, connections, wonder, freedom, personal autonomy, responsibility, tolerance, equality, diversity</p>	<p>The belief we have one life and it is up to us to make the most of it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief we are mortal • Potential positive consequences of accepting this is the one life we have on how we live • Recognising that our atoms, genes, ideas, works, and contributions to society can survive our deaths • The memories of someone who has died, and the impact they had on our lives, as sources of comfort and joy • Humanist funerals as an occasion for the living to grieve, to share memories, and to celebrate the life of the person who has died 	<p>The absence of belief in an ‘ultimate’ external meaning to life, but the capacity to make our own lives meaningful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making life meaningful by seeking happiness in the here and now and supporting others to do the same • The belief there is no one single answer to what makes a happy or meaningful life • Finding meaning in connections, creativity, curiosity, achieving our goals, and making the world a better place • Feeling connected to something bigger than ourselves – a community, human history, and the natural world • Finding wonder in the natural world, the human story, science, and art 	<p>Believing that everyone should have the freedom to pursue what makes them happy, as long as they cause no harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting personal autonomy – the freedom to make choices in life about what we believe and how we live • Being the authors of our own lives • The responsibility to think carefully about our choices and the consequences of our actions • Being tolerant of different people’s lifestyle choices • Celebrating the diverse ways people can find happiness • Trying to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to find happiness in the here and now
<p>Humanist ethics</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to ethics.</p> <p>Big question: How can I know what is good?</p> <p>Key vocab: welfare, flourishing, shared values, consequences, reason, empathy, the Golden Rule,</p>	<p>Believing that the origins of morality lie inside human beings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that many animals display altruistic behaviour • Recognising that empathy evolved naturally from our nature as social animals who live in communities • Recognising we have also evolved less friendly instincts • Understanding that biology does not tell us how we should act, but it can help explain the origins of our moral instincts and capacities • The belief that we don’t need to believe in a god to be good 	<p>Aiming to improve human welfare and happiness in the here and now</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The absence of belief that morality is about doing what some agent outside humanity wants of us – instead believing it is about our responsibilities to other people • Rejecting the claim that right and wrong is just a matter of personal preference • Recognising that we have evolved many shared needs and values, and these help us to think about how we should treat each other and to decide which outcomes are better than others • Considering the wellbeing and suffering of all human beings, and other animals 	<p>Thinking for ourselves about how to act, using empathy and reason</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that rules can sometimes be helpful but unquestionable rules can create problems • Considering the consequences of our actions • Taking responsibility for our own choices and actions • Recognising that reason doesn’t give us the answers to moral questions but it can help us to assess the evidence and be consistent • Treating other people the way we would like to be treated (the Golden Rule)

<p>responsibility, evolution, social animal, instincts</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising that moral dilemmas arise when our values come into conflict with each other • The belief that life is happier, fuller, and richer when we are good to each other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that hearing stories about other people can help to broaden our empathy
<p>Society</p> <p>Students should know about the following common features of a humanist approach to building a healthy society.</p> <p>Big question: What kind of world do I want?</p> <p>Key vocab: plural society, veil of ignorance, freedom, equality, justice, human rights, secularism, freedom of belief, responsibility, campaigning, progress</p>	<p>Promoting freedom, equality, and human rights</p>	<p>Supporting secularism and believing it benefits individuals and society</p>	<p>Believing that human beings alone are responsible for making the world a better place</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising a plural society as one in which there live people from different backgrounds, cultures, and traditions, with a range of worldviews • Believing that human beings share many needs and feelings • The veil of ignorance as a way to help us think about what would make a fair society and the work that needs to be done (the case for individual freedom and equality of opportunity) • The belief that human rights are based on our universal human needs and are designed to guarantee us all the freedom to live our lives the way we wish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misconceptions about secularism (it is not atheism) • Secularism as a position that advocates separation of church and state, freedom of belief, and equal treatment of all • The belief that secularism supports freedom, fairness, and peace • Humanists will typically be secularists, but so will many religious people • The UK is not a secular state • Secularism is under threat in many parts of the world • In many countries people are not free to be non-religious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The belief that help won't come from outside humanity • The absence of belief that wrongs will be put right in some future life, and the need to work for justice in the here and now • How individual humanists' concerns often stretch beyond the work of humanist organisations (humanists can be found campaigning for human welfare, peace, education, and the protection of the environment, and against poverty and injustice) • Recognising the significant progress we have made towards a fairer and better world, but that there is still much work to be done

Core knowledge: atheism and agnosticism

Atheism and agnosticism	Knowledge outcomes: Students should learn the following about atheists and agnostics		
Age 5-7 Key vocab: belief, atheist, humanist, evidence	An atheist is somebody who does not believe in a god	Many people don't believe in a god because they don't see any reason or evidence to believe	Humanists are people who believe it is possible to lead good and happy lives without the need to believe in a god
Age 7-11 Key vocab: belief, knowledge, atheist, agnostic, humanist, theist, certain, possible, probable, evidence, faith, proof	An atheist is somebody who does not believe in a god <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atheists don't see any persuasive reason or evidence to believe in a god • The evidence of suffering in the world makes many atheists find it hard to believe in an all-powerful, good god • Atheists don't believe a god created human beings, but believe human beings invented gods 	An agnostic is somebody who says we cannot know whether a god exists or not <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People can be more or less confident about their belief, or their absence of belief, in a god • Many atheists are also agnostic – they accept we can't know for certain, but they don't think that there is a good reason to believe • It is impossible to prove something does not exist 	Humanists are atheists and agnostics who believe we can lead good and happy lives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing someone is an atheist or agnostic doesn't tell you anything else about how they live their life • Many atheists and agnostics believe it is important people know that it is OK not to believe in a god • Humanists believe that it is possible to lead good, happy, and meaningful lives without the need to believe in a god • Around half of the UK are atheists or agnostics

Age 11-14 Key vocab: belief, knowledge, atheist, agnostic, humanist, theist, certain, possible, probable, evidence, faith, proof	An atheist is somebody who does not believe in a god <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atheists don't see any persuasive reason or evidence to believe in a god • The evidence of suffering in the world makes many atheists find it hard to believe in an all-powerful, good god • There are scientific and social explanations for why people might believe in a god • Atheists don't believe a god created human beings, but believe human beings invented gods 	An agnostic is somebody who says we cannot know whether a god exists or not <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People can be more or less confident about their belief or their absence of belief in a god • Many atheists are also agnostic – they accept we can't know for certain, but they don't think that there is a good reason to believe • Atheists believe the burden of proof should rest on the believer • It is impossible to prove something does not exist 	Humanists are atheists and agnostics who believe we can lead good and happy lives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing someone is an atheist or agnostic doesn't tell you anything else about how they live their life • Many atheists and agnostics believe it is important people know that it is OK not to believe in a god • Humanists believe that it is possible to lead good, happy, and meaningful lives without the need to believe in a god • Around half of the UK are atheists or agnostics (including some religious people)
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