



Reflecting on gates

Many churches have a gate into the churchyard, often with a cover, known as a lychgate. Traditionally the body was transferred from a cart to a wheeled bier at the lychgate (lych being Saxon for corpse).

Gates can also be used to symbolise transition and change and as a way of entering security or sanctuary.

You could use this...

- At times of change
- Before a new experience
- Before visiting a place of worship

Bible passages

- John 10:1-10 Jesus says, 'I am the gate'
- Matthew 7:13-14 Enter by the narrow gate
- Acts 3:2 Healing at the Gate Beautiful
- Psalm 118:20 The gate of the Lord



Watch the whole slide show

It may be appropriate to show all the photos a few times, with a fresh question for each showing. Some of the questions are grouped as they follow on and could be used as a sequence. Allow time between for children to adjust to the new question.

- Which gate would you like to go through? Why? What might happen through the gate?
- Which gate would you not like to go through? Why not? What might there be beyond the gate?
- How would you feel standing outside each gate? Which gates are comfortable? Which are disturbing?
- Pick a gate that is in some way like your life at the moment. If you went through the gate, what would it be like on the other side? Where does the path beyond the gate lead to? Who is going with you through the gate?
- Choose a gate you would like your life to be more like. Who would you like to go through that gate with you?

Show one gate

Choose a gate that evokes an emotional response in you rather than one you hope will evoke a specific response in the children. If you are using several questions allow time between the questions for the children to leave one question and begin the next.

Previous visitors

- Who has been through this gate? Why were they going through it? (wedding, funeral, procession, bishops, children, families, visitors to the graveyard) What were they wearing? How might

they have been feeling?

- Who has sheltered here? What were they sheltering from? How long did they stay? What were they thinking about while they were here?

The gate now

- Pause at the gate. What is it like being here? Enjoy the pause. Where does this gate lead to? What would it be like to go through the gate?
- Do you want to pause at this gate, or go through it and explore what is beyond it?
- Does the gate call you to it, or call you beyond it?
- What does the gate say about what is beyond it?
- What does this gate say about God, whose house is beyond the gate?
- Is the gate threatening or inviting?
- Who would you meet through this gate? Who would you like to meet through this gate?
- There are often notices on gates. What notice would you put on this gate?
- Gates are sometimes built in memory of someone special. Who would you remember as you went through this gate?

Through the gate

- Imagine going through the gate and entering the sanctuary it holds.
- What is different beyond the gate?
- Who was the last person to go through the gate? Where were they going? Were they going in or out? What were they carrying? Why did they go through the gate?
- Who goes through this gate on a Sunday? Who goes through this gate during the rest of the week?

Gates and change

- At a time of change ask the children to choose a gate that shows how they are feeling about the changes that are coming up. Why have they chosen this gate? What will it be like going through this gate? What will make the journey easier? What do they think is on the other side of the gate? Which gate would they prefer it to look like? Why? How can they make it into this gate?

I am the gate

- Jesus said, 'I am the gate.' How does that alter your view of the gate? How does that make the idea of going through the gate feel?
- What aspects of this gate tell you something about Jesus?
- What is on the other side of Jesus the gate?



Imagine

Show one of the photographs of a gate. Invite the children to imagine standing before the gate.

How does it feel, standing before this gate? What are you thinking? What can you hear?

Go up to the gate. Is it open or closed? What is it made of? Put your hand on the gate and push it open. Is it easy or hard to push? Listen to the noise it makes?

Walk through the gate? Listen to the noise your feet make on the path?

Who do you meet on the other side of the gate? Spend some time with them. Listen to their story. What do they want to show you? What do you want to tell them?

When you are ready they walk you back to the gate and leave you there. Pause before you go through it. How do you feel now? What from your journey beyond the gate will you take with you?

Walk through the gate. Close it and walk away.



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.