

Preparing for A Level Religious Studies

If you choose to study Religious Studies A level from September, you will be studying three areas:

Philosophy of Religion
 Religious Ethics
 Buddhism.

Choose any of the following activities to help you to prepare by thinking about some of the big questions you will be exploring on the course and generally getting your mind used to wrestling with ideas like these.

Something to watch	
<p>The Matrix Neo (played by Keanu Reeves) is offered the chance to take a pill which will enable him to see the world as it really is. He discovers that nothing is as he thought it was and a higher being has been playing with our minds....</p>	<p>This is based on the ideas of a French philosopher called Rene Descartes who said 'I think, therefore I am', by which he meant that the only things we can be sure of are the things going on inside our heads – anything on the outside could be an illusion. Watch the film and think about how we can tell what is real and what is not real</p>
<p>Minority Report In a world where some humans have the ability to read minds, the law enforcement agency uses this to find out when people are thinking of committing a crime and arresting and punishing them in advance. A great way to prevent crime...or is it?</p>	<p>As you watch, think about the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far should the authorities be able to invade our privacy in the interests of public safety? • Is this any different from obtaining data about our private on-line activities? • Do we always do the things we think about doing? What issues would this raise for punishing people who think about committing crimes? • Can we punish people who have actually done nothing wrong on the grounds that they might?
<p>Blade Runner Based on the brilliant book <i>Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?</i> this is about a not-so-distant future when androids known as 'replicants' are an everyday part of society. But the replicants go rogue and need to be hunted down.</p>	<p>Think as you watch about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether the replicants are 'human' • What this tells you about your views on what it means to be human. • Whether it is right to hunt the replicants down because their programming has gone wrong • What this tells you about your views about punishing people who have had a bad upbringing or have mental illness
<p>Gattaca The film is set in a future society where potential children are conceived using genetic selection to ensure they inherit the best characteristics possible from their parents, a practice also known as eugenics. Children not born this way become second-class citizens. What happens when one man, not born using genetic engineering, wants to fulfil his dream of being an astronaut?</p>	<p>This film raises questions like</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should we use genetic engineering to make 'better' people? • Just because we can do something like this, does that mean we should? • We currently allow genetic screening for some inherited disabilities during IVF treatment – does this risk a 'slippery slope' where we come to allow it for other reasons and if that happens, could we end up in a situation like that in the film? • Is our pursuit of perfection wrong? • What are the effects of discrimination on

	<p>those being discriminated against?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is every life equally valuable?
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Something to read – some of these are also films but the books are better!	
Never let me go by Kazuo Ishiguro	Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewed version of contemporary England. Narrated by Kathy, now thirty-one, <i>Never Let Me Go</i> dramatizes her attempts to come to terms with her childhood at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends in the wider world.
We need to talk about Kevin by Lionel Shriver	Eva never really wanted to be a mother; certainly not the mother of the unlovable boy who murdered seven of his fellow high school students, a cafeteria worker and a teacher who tried to befriend him. Now, two years later, it is time for her to come to terms with marriage, career, family, parenthood and Kevin's horrific rampage in a series of startlingly direct correspondences with her absent husband, Franklyn. Uneasy with the sacrifices and social demotion of motherhood from the start, Eva fears that her alarming dislike for her own son may be responsible for driving him so nihilistically off the rails.
The Life of Pi by Yann Martel	After the tragic sinking of a cargo ship, a solitary lifeboat remains bobbing on the wild, blue Pacific. The only survivors from the wreck are a sixteen year-old boy named Pi, a hyena, a zebra (with a broken leg), a female orang-utan and a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. The scene is set for one of the most extraordinary and best-loved works of fiction in recent years.
Keeping Faith by Jodi Picoult	A young girl claims to have religious experiences – but how can we know that they are real?
My Sister's Keeper by Jodi Picoult	This explores the issue of saviour siblings – a child who is conceived so she can be an exact match for an existing child who needs a transplant. How would it feel to be that child?
Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder	This book leads you through a history of the great philosophers right through to the modern age. With Sophie, the reader is encouraged to question the world around themselves. The teacher-pupil structure enhances the plot, whose mysteries will keep you wondering to the last page.
Knowledge of Angels by Jill Paton Walsh	It is the 15 th century – a feral child is discovered. Can the child be convinced of the existence of God?

TED talks to watch and think about

https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_ariely_are_we_in_control_of_our_own_decisions?referrer=playlist-how_we_make_choices

Behavioural economist Dan Ariely, the author of Predictably Irrational, uses classic visual illusions and his own counterintuitive (and sometimes shocking) research findings to show how we're not as rational as we think when we make decisions.

https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_tarter_join_the_seti_search?referrer=playlist-are_we_alone_in_the_universe

The SETI Institute's Jill Tarter makes her TED Prize wish: to accelerate our search for cosmic company. Using a growing array of radio telescopes, she and her team listen for patterns that may be a sign of intelligence elsewhere in the universe.

https://www.ted.com/talks/jim_holt_why_does_the_universe_exist?referrer=playlist-unsolved_mysteries

Why is there something instead of nothing? In other words: Why does the universe exist (and why are we in it)? Philosopher and writer Jim Holt follows this question toward three possible answers. Or four. Or none.

https://www.ted.com/talks/will_macaskill_what_are_the_most_important_moral_problems_of_our_time

Of all the problems facing humanity, which should we focus on solving first? In a compelling talk about how to make the world better, moral philosopher Will MacAskill provides a framework for answering this question based on the philosophy of "effective altruism" -- and shares ideas for taking on three pressing global issues.

https://www.ted.com/talks/peter_singer_the_why_and_how_of_effective_altruism

If you're lucky enough to live without want, it's a natural impulse to be altruistic to others. But, asks philosopher Peter Singer, what's the most effective way to give? He talks through some surprising thought experiments to help you balance emotion and practicality -- and make the biggest impact with whatever you can share. NOTE: Starting at 0:30, this talk contains 30 seconds of graphic footage.