



Ealing Agreed Syllabus: guidance for teachers

KS3.13: Mixed metaphors

Overall aim: To compare religious/poetic/metaphoric thinking to scientific/logical thinking.

<i>Right brain/left brain</i>	<i>Students will</i>	learn what is known about the lateralization of brain function; they will also explore how the descriptions 'left-brained' and 'right-brained' are used metaphorically.
Aim: to look at the idea of lateralization of brain function.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: On the IWB, put up the following quote from Bill Lee: "You have two hemispheres in your brain – a left and a right side. The left side controls the right side of your body and right controls the left half. It's a fact. Therefore, left-handers are the only people in their right minds."</p> <p>Show video of Lee, former pitcher for the Boston Red Sox. Point out that he was what was known in American baseball as a "southpaw", i.e. he pitched with his left hand. Ask class: How many of you are left-handed? Right-handed? Ambidextrous? If someone is ambidextrous, can they do everything with both hands with equal ease, or is it only one specific task?</p>		<p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3HuFGLh7Fw</p>
<p>Activity 1: What are some common beliefs and misconceptions about handedness? What about common beliefs about brain lateralization? Draw a schematic of a brain on the IWB. What does the class think they know about what side of the brain controls what activity, or what type of thinking? Label your schematic with what the class thinks and then show some popular images of brain lateralisation (see background information).</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Based on popular beliefs about brain lateralization, how would the members of the class describe themselves? Look at one of the schematics that show the right hemisphere as the seat of imagination, feeling and creativity and the left as the seat of logic and scientific thinking. Do these images affect the way we want to think of ourselves? Does society value all these different modes of thinking/expressing/being equally?</p>		

<p>Activity 3: Explain to the class what scientists have actually determined about brain lateralization using such technics as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). That although certain functions are localized (e.g. the left hemisphere has structures dominant for language, the right for nonverbal and spatial processing) human cognition is an extremely complex process. Every action, thought, and calculation made by the brain is an intricate process involving neurons from all over the brain. That the complex processes pictured in the popular images can't be pinned down to one hemisphere. That is, an individual isn't "right brained" or "left brained" but rather they use each side for different principal functions.</p>	<p>See background information.</p>
<p>Activity 4: Look at a series of posters in the Mercedes Benz "right brain/left brain" ad campaign. Ask: What do you think they are trying to say with these ads? Could one possibility be that to make a beautiful car the team needs to have all the qualities implied in the metaphor of "right and left brained-ness"? Still sticking with the metaphor, go back to the schematic of the brain and list those activities where a person might draw mainly on qualities associated with each of the hemispheres. And then list those activities or situations where a person would need both.</p>	<p>http://www.fuelyourcreativity.com/left-brain-vs-right-brain-advertising/</p>
<p>Plenary: Summarise what has been discussed so far, i.e. what science can tell us about brain function lateralization and what the metaphor (i.e. "right-brained" vs "left-brained") tells us. Have an open discussion about situations where employing the metaphor might be apt, and others when it would be important to actually know how the brain operates.</p> <p>Bring the discussion back to individual experience. Do members of the class ever feel themselves 'switching' (metaphorically) into another mode of perception/thinking?</p> <p>Finally bring the discussion round to the study of religions and beliefs. What can logical thinking contribute to this study? What can imaginative thinking and the understanding of the use of metaphor contribute? Explain that this is what we're hoping to explore during the course of this unit.</p>	

<i>Types of thinking</i>	<i>Students will</i>	learn ways we classify different types of thinking/learning; explore why it might be important to try and experience/understand modes of thinking different to our own.
Aim: to explore different modes of learning and thinking.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: Ask students to write down, in a few descriptive words, answers to the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe the way you think? 2. How do you learn something? 3. Are your thinking/learning styles the same for all kinds of tasks? For example, practical tasks such as cooking an omelette compared to an academic study such as history. 4. Do you know anyone whose way of thinking/learning is very different from your own? 		
<p>Activity 1: Students to complete a VAK (Visual/Auditory/Kinaesthetic) learning style questionnaire to determine their preferred learning style. Get them to compare their answers to the starter questions to the results of the questionnaire. (For example, VAK learning style questionnaire, e.g. http://brainboxx.co.uk/a3_aspects/pages/VAK_quest.htm)</p>		
<p>Activity 2: Group students by their preferred learning style and ask each group to create a school timetable based on their preferred learning style.</p>		Outline of school timetable
<p>Activity 3: Re-form into new groups so that all three learning styles (VAK) are represented. Each student to share their ideas and timetables. Students to ask each other questions about their timetables using higher order thinking skills (HOTS) e.g. What are the advantages and disadvantages of following your timetable.</p>		
<p>Activity 4: Individually, students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compare their preferred timetable with their actual school timetable. ▪ Note the similarities and differences. ▪ Are they balanced timetables? ▪ Is a balanced curriculum important? 		
<p>Plenary: Try to ‘analyse’ RE with reference to learning styles: what aspects of the subject might appeal to the different styles. Then do the same for the <i>practice</i> of religion and/or philosophy. For example, an atheist might appreciate the sensory experience of a place of worship, yet they may find that the tenets of that religion don’t satisfy them on a logical level. Another person who is religious may get great intellectual satisfaction from debating various aspects of their tradition’s beliefs.</p>		

<i>The big picture</i>	<i>Students will</i>	understand the importance of being able to vary one's response—intellectually and emotionally—to different situations.
Aim: to explore the variety of responses to a complex situation.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
<p>Starter: Watch a clip from the TV programme “24 hours in A&E” (e.g. Three Sisters episode, Series 3 episode 2) or a similar sort of show, where a variety of human interactions are taking place. (The “Three Sisters” episode is a good one for provoking discussion, as the sisters lie to their mother about her condition as they know from experience that telling her the truth will only distress her.)</p>		http://www.free-tv-video-online.me/internet/24_hours_in_a_and_e/
<p>Activity 1: Create a mind map showing all the people that might be involved in helping that person at this difficult point in their life e.g. doctors, nurses, children, parents or religious/humanist hospital chaplain.</p> <p>Against each person that has been identified, write down how they could assist the patient. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Doctor: knowledge of medical condition and prioritising treatments ▪ Family member: compassion and comfort (but this can also come from different medical personnel) <p>Point out that in the A&E situation, one doctor in a major trauma—the lead—must stand back and keep sight of the ‘bigger picture’, whereas other medical personnel can hone in on a single detail of the treatment or keep track of something like the patient’s blood pressure or alertness.</p>		
<p>Activity 2: De-bono hats activity: Each person in the group to be given a specific role and respond to the scenario from their ‘coloured hat’ perspective.</p>		See background information.
<p>Activity 3: In their groups, discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is one person’s role more important than another? ▪ Who might the patient most want to be with them at a potentially life-threatening moment? ▪ Does every individual have an important role to play or is one more important than another? Can this change as the situation changes? 		

Plenary: Have an open discussion about the question of a 'right' and 'wrong' response, starting with: is this even a straightforward question? Imagine the various people in the scenario of the lesson trying to answer that question. And then imagine how the person concerned might change their response in hindsight (e.g. a patient might really appreciate the nurse/relative holding their hand at the time of their injury, whereas in hindsight they might realise how vital a role the doctor was playing by remaining aloof in order to keep sight of the bigger picture. If possible, show a clip from series 3 episode 20, where the lead doctor (Des) manages to do both. Note that whereas this might be the 'ideal' (i.e. managing all the details of the bigger picture while still being able to demonstrate compassion to the patient and their distressed relatives) this isn't always possible.

<i>Speaking metaphorically</i>	<i>Students will</i>	explore the use of metaphoric language; reflect on their own differing responses to metaphoric and non-metaphoric language; understand that science often employs metaphoric language to convey difficult concepts.
Aim: to explore why metaphors are often used to convey difficult concepts or hard-to-describe experiences.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
Starter: What is a metaphor? Students to create a mind map of metaphors, e.g. my heart is broken, plenty more fish in the sea, etc.		
Activity 1: Look at examples of metaphors in poetry (e.g. Shakespeare’s “All the world’s a stage...”) Students identify the metaphors. Question: Why do we use metaphors?		
Activity 2: Look more closely at the metaphor “my heart is broken”. Imagine what situations you might be in where you would use that metaphor. Imagine you or a relative had something physically wrong with your/their heart. Would you want your doctor or surgeon to say “your heart is broken”, or would you want them to use more scientific language? Would you want them to describe (possibly with diagrams) what was wrong and how they were going to fix it? What would you find more reassuring? Note that the doctor’s explanation might involve metaphors, for instance comparing the heart to a pump with a faulty intake valve. Then, consider the colloquial sense of a broken heart. Would you want a friend to present a plan (possibly with diagrams) as to how to fix your broken heart? Or might you want, at least initially, simple compassion, perhaps a hug, or even a friend to reassure you that indeed there are more fish in the sea.		
Activity 3: Hand out biblical metaphors to pairs and ask students to interpret meanings. Are these literal? Why use metaphors? Examples could include: “All flesh is grass” (Isa. 40:6) “The Lord is my shepherd.” (Psalm 23:1) “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11) “I am the vine; you are the branches.” (John 15:5)		
Activity 3: Read/listen to Psalm 23. Get class to identify the metaphors. Ask: What do you think the psalmist was trying to convey?		

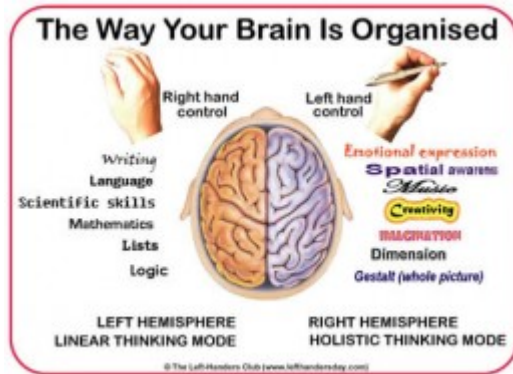
<p>Activity 4: Tell class that the mythologist Joseph Campbell believed that the most important thing about any spiritual or peak experience was the experience itself. That the second most important thing is how the individual interprets the experience and how they fit it into their beliefs and past experiences, and that third most important thing is how we explain our spiritual experiences to others. Do the class agree with this? Get the class to imagine/assume they have had some profound experience, religious or otherwise. What language would they use to try and convey that experience to others? Would they use different approaches when speaking to different people, or even when recounting the story at different times (e.g. immediately after the event or after several years)? Why?</p>	
<p>Activity 5: Write on the IWB: “The map is not the territory.” Brainstorm what this might mean. Explain to class that this was a statement by the Polish American philosopher and scientist Alfred Korzybski. Korzybski thought that people do not have access to direct knowledge of reality; rather they have access to perceptions and to a set of beliefs which human society has confused with direct knowledge of reality, in other words what humans say about reality is just a map sketching certain dimensions/perceptions of reality.</p>	
<p>Plenary: Summarise the discussion, including the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Metaphors are often used to convey things that are difficult to describe in plain language ▪ A metaphor can actually convey an emotional charge, which may or may not reflect the experience of the person using it. ▪ Scientists also use metaphors to convey concepts to the general public or to other scientists not familiar with their field. ▪ End the discussion with a consideration of why so much of religious literature contains metaphor. Could it be because experiences described as ‘spiritual’ are so hard to put into words? Does the phrase “the map is not the territory” help us to understand why there might be so many <i>different</i> religious explanations for existence and human experience? 	

<i>Words for wonder</i>	<i>Students will</i>	explore the ways words are used to convey wonder; understand that people can experience wonder in a variety of contexts.
Aim: to look at the way poetry and prose can convey wonder	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
Starter: Watch a video showing human or animal foetal development e.g. clip of a tadpole/frog from 'Life on Earth'. Ask students to respond to the video in one word (excluding the word 'baby' or 'frog').		
Activity 1: Divide class into three. One group is going to respond to the clip from a precise, scientific perspective, e.g. factual description/list. The second group will write from a scientific perspective, but employing prose that attempts to convey the wonder the scientist might experience. Students assigned to the final group will write a poem, rap or song. Have resources/ examples for each group as stimulus. Discuss the key features to be covered by the descriptions/poems etc. Encourage all groups to attempt to convey wonder using their assigned language mode (e.g. precise data, scientific prose employing metaphors or poetic).		
Activity 2: Students to complete their description or poem/song or rap.		
Activity 3: Peer assessment (www/ebi: what went well/even better if)		
Plenary: Open discussion on the following two statements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Science is better at explaining nature than poems" ▪ "Poetry is better at conveying wonder than science." 		

<i>Mythic narrative</i>	<i>Students will</i>	look at various ways of describing/responding to current events; explore the relevance of this to the study of 'sacred' history.
Aim: to begin to explore the nature of religious narratives.	<i>SEN</i>	
	<i>Gifted</i>	
Possible activities		Suggested resources
Starter: Mind map some key topical events from the news e.g. a terrorist attack or natural disaster.		
Activity 1: Choose one of the events to focus on. Ask class how they imagine the following individuals might respond to the event: journalist, family member, victim/survivor, detached observer or forensic scientist. Discuss the various means that might be used to convey the experience/reality of the event: e.g. a newspaper report, investigation report, memorial piece, song or poem.		
Activity 2: Discuss how it might be important for people immediately touched by a traumatic/life-changing event to use heightened language to convey/contain their feelings. Have an open discussion about how such events become 'markers' in an individual or group's life story (e.g. anniversary programmes about the attack on 9/11). Can repetition/remembrance of this event shape identity?		
Activity 3: Explain that you are now going to employ some of the learning of this unit to examine a historical narrative that has relevance to the study of religions, in particular how some historical accounts become mythologised. See extract in the background information from the article "Sacred history", which looks at the way the conquest of the Aztecs by the Spanish became mythologised. Whose account of the events surrounding the 'conquest' would be most valid? Why do the students think that the events were perceived in 'mythic' terms by the participants?		
Plenary: Look briefly at the Jewish festival of Pesach (see background information). How has repetition of this 'story' helped to perpetuate the Jewish identity and forge familial/community bonds? Do students have any event in their own life story that has become a similar focal moment?		

Key words	Metaphor, learning styles (VAK: visual/auditory/kinaesthetic)
Points to note	Students should be encouraged during this unit to have open-ended discussions.
Sample assessment activities	

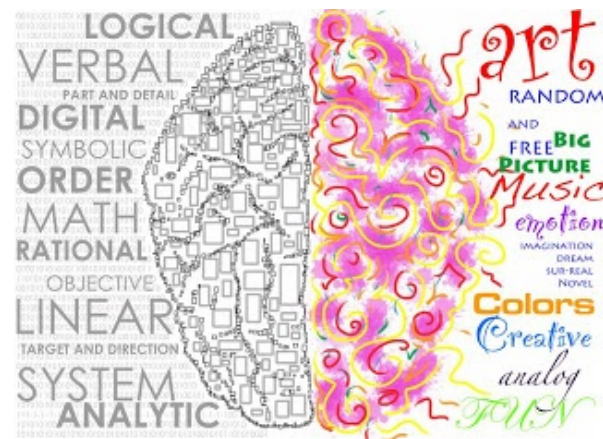
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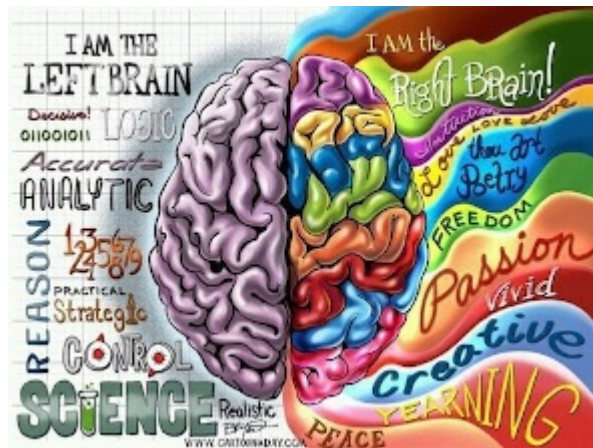
www.engineeringbuddies.com

- *Right-handedness* is most common. Right-handed people are more dexterous with their right hands when performing tasks. A variety of studies suggest that 70–90% of the world population is right-handed.
- *Left-handedness* is less common than right-handedness. Left-handed people are more dexterous with their left hands when performing tasks. A variety of studies suggest that approximately 10% of the world population is left-handed.
- *Mixed-Handedness* is the change of hand preference between different tasks. This is common in the population with about a 30% prevalence.
- *Ambidexterity* is exceptionally rare, although it can be learned. A truly ambidextrous person is able to do any task equally well with either hand. Those who learn it still tend to favor their originally dominant hand.

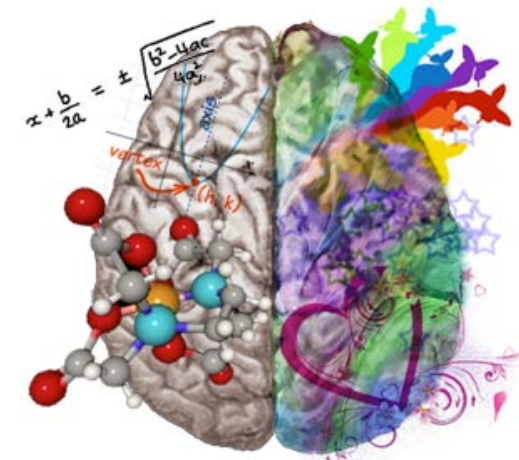
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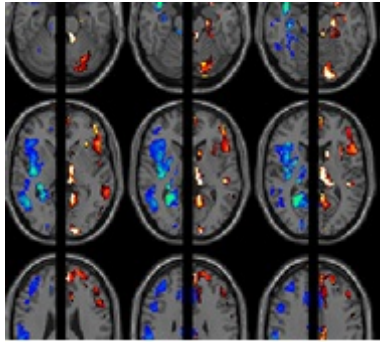
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www.huffingtonpost.com



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[Brain MRI](#)

Brain-Based Labels Bunk?

An fMRI study shows speculations that people are “left-brained” versus “right-brained” are not backed by evidence.

By Kate Yandell | August 19, 2013

Creative types have been commonly thought to rely on the right side of their brains, while analytical folk have been considered more “left-brained” thinkers. But people don’t actually show such tendencies toward either left- or right-brained activity, according to a study published last week (August 14) in [PLOS ONE](#).

“It’s absolutely true that some brain functions occur in one or the other side of the brain. Language tends to be on the left, attention more on the right,” explained study coauthor Jeff Anderson of the University of Utah in a press release. “But people don’t tend to have a stronger left- or right-sided brain network. It seems to be determined more connection by connection.”

Anderson and his colleagues analyzed functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) data from the brains of more than 1,000 resting subjects. While the researchers found that various regions of the subjects’ brains were “lateralized,” with certain mental processes occurring on one side of the brain or the other, across whole brains, neither the left nor the right side seemed to dominate.

“It may be that personality types have nothing to do with one hemisphere being more active, stronger, or more connected,” said coauthor Jared Nielsen, a graduate student in neuroscience at Utah, in the press release.

<http://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/37120/title/Brain-Based-Labels-Bunk-/>

MY BOSS SAID THIS CLIENT IS OUR
BREAD AND BUTTER.



He meant they are our main source of revenue –
not something to eat!

[GlobalEnglish business language ad](#)

The language used to talk about computers is uniquely colorful and sometimes extraordinarily difficult. This paper examines 'computer discourse' and points out its highly metaphorical nature. While the use of metaphor is unavoidable, it often leads, especially in informal settings, to the mannered use of words we call jargon. Metaphor becomes jargon when it is used too literally in a self-conscious manner. Experts often use their metaphors as though they were literally true. Technical details fall away and the metaphor is taken for the reality it represents. The less expert sometimes mimic the language they hear, in a self-conscious manner, without truly understanding it.

Abstract of "Talking about computers: From Metaphor to Jargon" by Gerald J. Johnson PhD
(From: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2F02472798#page-1>)

"Because metaphors suggest analogies, they can be dangerous. The danger arises when we apply the analogy without thinking, in ways that really aren't supportable. For example, even though we talk about 'revving up' people, motivating people requires much more than flipping a switch. And once people are 'revved up,' they can become very creative — so creative that it sometimes happens that they see even better ways to do what you might have wanted, or they might even find something wrong with the original idea. Rotating machinery hardly ever does that kind of thing. When we think about real people as if they were as simple as rotating machinery, we can go dangerously wrong — the metaphor 'wags our minds' like the metaphorical tail wagging the dog." (From: <http://www.chacocanyon.com/essays/metaphors.shtml>)

The Six Hats:



The White Hat:
calls for information known or needed.
"The facts, just the facts."



The Yellow Hat:
symbolizes brightness and optimism. You can explore the positives and probe for value and benefit



The Black Hat:
signifies caution and critical thinking - do not overuse! Why something may not work



The Green Hat:
focuses on creativity, possibilities, alternatives and new ideas. It is an opportunity to express new concepts and new perceptions - lateral thinking could be used here



The Blue Hat:
is used to manage the thinking process. It ensures that the 'Six Thinking Hats' guidelines are observed.



The Red Hat:
signifies feelings, hunches and intuition - the place where emotions are placed without explanation

The use of metaphors in science and technology by Rod Pitcher

Metaphors are widely used in science and technology. They allow explication of new research results by comparing them with old or existing knowledge, which may or may not be scientific.

The old knowledge might be something that is held by everyone. The new knowledge is held by a few who must make it clear to any interested others so that it can be spread throughout the scientific or technological community. Science communicators do the same for the public. Often the ideas are so new that without using metaphors it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to explain them.

How to explain a new invention

A new technology, like a computer network, needs to be explained to people who have no knowledge of it. In this case, one can talk about the 'web' of the network, comparing it to a spider's web, either by drawing diagrams or showing the person a real spider's web. Thus the principal involved in how the points of the network are interconnected can be made clear to anyone who has ever seen a spider's web. (Continued on next page.)

Using metaphors in teaching science and technology

There is the need then for compelling and accurate metaphors to communicate the new knowledge to students. The use of metaphors makes it easier for an audience to grasp the principal of the thing.

Metaphors not only allow the knowledge to be passed on but also help in developing the vocabulary of the discipline, since many of the words used in science and technology are directly derived from the metaphors used to illustrate the concepts.

For instance, in talking about electricity we can describe electrons passing along a wire and make the comparison to water flowing through a pipe. The words 'flow' and 'current' used to describe moving water help us to describe electrons moving through a conductive metal. Thus in learning this metaphor the student has also learnt some scientific words. In the case of 'current' there will be more for students to learn and of course many ways in which the uses of 'flow' and 'current' differ depending on the discipline.

This process is not unique to the sciences. We can see how other fields use scientific processes as metaphors for human or social phenomena. When we talk about a 'groundswell' of public support, a candidate's 'momentum', or a particular issue as a 'lightning rod', we are using images from the scientifically described world as a kind of descriptive shorthand.

What about bad metaphors?

The provisional nature of knowledge means that that we should also be careful about how we use metaphors; reminding students that 'the map is not the territory'. Bohr's model of the atom and Copernicus' model of the Solar System were better metaphors than what had come before, but they remain provisional representations — they are now used for beginners in the field, steps along the way to more complex analogies.

Why so many metaphors in science and technology?

Science and technology, then, are prolific users of metaphors. It's difficult to imagine any part of science or technology that doesn't use them somewhere in its explanations of what is going on.

You can imagine a number of metaphors that might apply in a description of luminescence. Depending on the audience's existing knowledge of chemical reactions and electronic states, a teacher or lecturer could convey the processes at work here in a number of ways. Describing Bohr's 'planetary model' of the atom would be a useful first step.

Metaphors allow explanations to be constructed that can be understood by anyone with a little effort. If all teaching of science or technology, or spreading of information about their results, was done using only non-metaphorical scientific words there would be a lot less people who had any knowledge of what it all means, including many scientists and technologists!

<http://theteachingtomtom.wordpress.com/2012/11/29/the-use-of-metaphors-in-science-and-technology/>

The Return of Quetzalcoatl (From [Sacred history](#))



Quetzalcoatl



Huitzilopochtli

“Huitzilopochtli commands us to look for this place. When we discover it we shall be fortunate, for there we shall find our rest, our comfort and our grandeur...”

Historia de la Indias de la Nueva España, Fray Diego Duran, 1581

It is often in retrospect that we see something extraordinary in the unfolding of events; the perception of history as divinely appointed occurs again and again. It also has to be admitted that the favour of a god has been used to legitimize the standing of a people already in power; this is not to question all religious affiliation, but rather to state that allegiance to a supreme being is not without its mundane use.

The earliest Aztecs—or Mexica—did not keep written records, passing on their traditions by word of mouth from one generation to the next until the 16th century when Spanish friars wrote down much of their history. In addition, the story of their migration from the legendary northern homeland of Aztlán (‘place of the heron’) under the guidance of the god Huitzilopochtli (above right) appears in several post-conquest works that use the traditional Toltec writing that is both pictographic and ideographic. For instance the Boturini codex (right): here Huitzilopochtli is shown wrapped in a medicine bundle, and carried on the back of one of the priests. (The image depicts, with ‘speech glyphs’, the god giving directions; the ‘footprints’ in the codex, often believed to indicate direction, have also been interpreted as an indication of the god’s invisible presence.)



The divine ‘sign’
from *Codex Mendoza*

According to tradition, Huitzilopochtli told the Mexica to search for a sign—an eagle perched on a cactus devouring a snake—an epiphany that they subsequently observed on an island in Lake Texcoco. The humble settlement subsequently established there grew into Tenochtitlan (‘place of the fruit of the cactus, *tenochtli*’)—now Mexico City. It was after their rise to power that the Aztecs declared Huitzilopochtli to be the supreme god of war and their own particular patron.

In 1519 CE* the Spanish conquistador Hernando Cortes landed on the Mexican coast, thus initiating an encounter that would be entered into history—on both sides—in frankly mythic terms. Bernal Diaz, one of the soldiers accompanying Cortes, describes his first impressions of the great Aztec empire: “And when we saw all those cities and villages built in the water, and other great towns on dry land, and that straight and level causeway leading to Mexico [i.e. Tenochtitlan], we were astounded...[It] seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. Indeed some of our soldiers asked whether it was not all a dream...It was all so wonderful that I do not know how to describe this first glimpse of things never heard of, seen or dreamed of before.” (*The Conquest of New Spain*, c1570 CE.)



Image of the eagle
and the serpent
on the Mexican flag

A people's beliefs can condition both perception and expectation. By an astounding coincidence, Cortes had landed in Mexico on the day in the Aztec sacred calendar prophesied for the return of another native deity, the god Quetzalcoatl. When the Mexica ruler, Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, finally met Cortes on the outskirts of Tenochtitlan, he is quoted as saying: "Thou hast come to arrive on earth. Thou hast come to govern the city of Mexico; thou hast come to descend on my mat...which I have guarded for thee..." (*Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, Bernardino de Sahagun).

The Aztecs had been aware of the presence of the Spanish almost from the moment they had beached their ships, and apprehension and apocalyptic fervour was rife. Moctezuma himself was prone to experiencing visions, and it seems certain that he believed—at least initially—that he was walking out to an encounter with the divine. At the same time, from Bernal Diaz's account of events it is clear that the Spanish interpreted much of what happened (not to mention justifying the conquest itself) in terms of their own Christian doctrine and beliefs.

Just ten years after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, an Aztec baptised by Spanish friars had a vision of Mary, the mother of Jesus; this 'Virgin of Guadalupe' demanded that a church be built for her on Tepeyac Hill. It is perhaps no small coincidence that the church was established on the very spot previously occupied by a temple dedicated to the earth goddess Tonatzin; nor that the bishop who was instructed to ensure the construction was the same man who had previously given the order to have Tonatzin's temple razed.

In the centuries following the conquest, several people have tried to identify the god Quetzalcoatl with Christ, seeing in the conversion of the natives the 'proof' of his return. The Spanish may have imposed their religion on the subjugated people, however willing their conversion. But a people's sacred history is not easily relinquished; the sign given to the Aztecs during their wanderings—the eagle devouring the serpent—now appears in the centre of the Mexican flag.

A miraculous escape (from [Sacred History](#))



The parting of the red sea
Mark Chagall
sites.stfx.ca

“Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: *Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.*”
Exodus 15: 20-21

The Jewish festival of Pesach, or **Passover**, is one of the three major festivals of Judaism with both historical and agricultural significance. Agriculturally it represents the beginning of the harvest season in Israel. However the primary observances of the festival are related to the narrative of the liberation from slavery and the flight from Egypt of the ancient Israelites, as told in the biblical book of *Exodus*.

‘Pesach’ derives from a Hebrew root word meaning ‘to pass over, to spare’, hence the English name of the festival. It is a reference to the belief that the god Yahweh passed over the Israelites when he was slaying the first born of Egypt. This was the final of ten plagues affecting Egypt, sent— according to biblical view—by Yahweh to the Egyptian pharaoh as a punishment for keeping the Israelites in slavery.

According to the biblical account, in spite of initially allowing the Israelites to depart, the pharaoh changed his mind and went after them. Through his prophet Moses, Yahweh led the Israelites to the Sea of Reeds (the original Hebrew is *yam suph*, which actually means ‘Reed Sea’, not the Red Sea featured in early English translations), and then gave Moses the power to divide the water. Then, when the Israelites were safely across, the sea was allowed to close over again, engulfing the pursuing army.

There have been many efforts over the years to relate biblical places and events to their historical counterparts. To this day there remains wide disagreement as to the precise identity of such basic landmarks as the Sea of Reeds and Mount Sinai. One school of thought holds that Moses led the escaping Israelites across the Gulf of Suez at ebb tide, then watched as the water rose to its customary six and a half feet and drowned the pursuing Egyptians. An alternative theory is that they crossed Lake Sirbonis, one of the lakes to the east of the Nile which is separated from the Mediterranean by a narrow isthmus; the surrounding land is swampy and treacherous and the isthmus itself is frequently submerged during storms. The ten plagues described in the biblical account—lice, pestilence, locusts, boils, etc—are all commonplace features of life in Egypt. The rising of the Nile in spring brings floating micro-organisms that colour the water red, perhaps accounting for the first of the plagues: the turning of the water into blood.

From this vantage point, it is probably impossible to discover the reality of what happened. What does seem possible is that a group of slaves managed to escape while their overseers were preoccupied. And that this escape felt ‘miraculous’, and for generations to come would be celebrated as such.



15th century Passover Haggadah
(*haggadah*, 'narrative')
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Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast." *Exodus* 13: 3

Jews have been celebrating Passover since about 1300 BCE, following the rules laid down in the second book of the Bible (*Exodus*, chapter 13). For example, in the passage quoted above, they are forbidden from eating anything containing yeast, and before Passover can begin, the house must be cleaned from top to bottom to remove any traces of leaven, commemoration of the fact that the Israelites did not have time to let their bread rise when they were ordered by Moses to flee.

Passover typically lasts from 6-8 days, the highlight occurring on one of the first two nights, when friends and family gather for the *seder*. *Seder* means 'order' and the sequence of ritual and narrative to be followed during the meal can be found in special books known as *Haggadah*. Each item in the meal is replete with symbolic significance, for example bitter herbs (most often horseradish) representing the bitterness of slavery, the *karpas* (greens such as parsley dipped in salt water) to represent tears, and *charoset* (a paste made of fruit, nuts and wine) which is meant to symbolise the mortar used by the slaves during their forced labour.

"Why is this night different from all other nights?"

(*Mah Nishtanah*, the asking of the four questions, from the *Maggid*, or story portion of the *seder*)

The word 'synchronicity' is given to the perception of meaning in a random confluence of chance occurrences. This is not to suggest that life isn't intrinsically meaningful, but rather that the ability to experience events as fated or divinely orchestrated is one of the mysteries of human existence. Even if the escape from slavery was nothing more than a lucky break, it remains a defining moment in the forging of the Jewish identity. Through the remembrance of these events during Passover, Jews reaffirm their relationship with the power they believe responsible for their liberation; in the *seder barech*—the grace after meals—a cup of wine is poured and a door opened for the arrival of the prophet Elijah, symbolising their desire to keep the channels of revelation alive.

It is all too easy, when reading a 'sacred history' such as recorded in the book of *Exodus*, to either dismiss it as 'myth' or the product of a superstitious mind. Or, if we are determined to maintain belief, to think that events were different in ancient times, that somehow the supernatural was more visible. However I believe it is important to realise that the material world hasn't changed, that both physical and psychic reality remain much the same as ever. And that what people experienced 'back then', we, too, are capable of experiencing.

To believe or not to believe, perhaps that is the question. Yet for all of us, whatever the answer, the festival of Passover can remind us of how the taste of tears and the experience of good fortune are both part and parcel of life. And to recollect those moments in our own personal experience that we would set apart as 'miraculous', worthy of remembering as "different from all other times..."