

CCC Writing Project: The Thinking Classroom for Secondary Religious Education

Topic: Informed Conscience

Grade(s): 9-12

Duration: 3-5 classes

Activity Overview, Rationale, and Description

The formation and *in*-formation of conscience, in our contemporary culture, can be seen as a nearly impossible task since there are so many competing influences vying for our students' attention and adherence. More often than not, these influences provide erroneous direction and offer a view of the human person which is contradictory to the Catholic understanding of the person, created *imago Dei*.

In a secondary religious education classroom, this tension between the secular world and our Catholic faith can lead to difficult and controversial dialogue with our students. In order for students to comprehend the Catholic teaching about the informed conscience, sufficient groundwork should be provided which can help students to understand the precise definition of the conscience, according to the Catholic Church, but this should be accomplished in a manner which is engaging, informational, and student-driven.

This particular term will be explored through collaboration with peers, independent research, and various activities designed to help students think critically about decisions which could require more deliberation than anticipated. The main application of the informed conscience will be in a further exploration of stewardship, culminating in an assessment which includes a class presentation.

Overall Expectations

HRE101:

- **CM1.2:** examine the nature of sin (personal and social), types of sin (original, venial, mortal; sins in thought, word, deed and omission) and the role of conscience in moral decision-making
- **CM2.3:** explain what makes authority legitimate [CCC nos. 1897-1904] and explore the role of Church teaching, law and conscience in moral decision making

HRE201:

- **PF3.1:** analyze the Christian meaning of personhood as being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1.27) (Evangelium Vitae, par. 40 and 81 - re: The Human Vocation: Life in God's Spirit- 1. Humans are created in the image and likeness of God. 2. Humans are called to happiness and holiness. 3. Humans are rational and free. 4. Humans are moral beings. 5. Humans have passions and feelings. 6. Humans are blessed with a conscience. 7.

Humans are able to sin.)

- **CM3.2:** explore ways that we could use Jesus' teachings, the principles of social justice and the witnesses of 'saints' as the criteria for analyzing social injustice issues in order and to respond with fortitude and compassion to situations of injustice and prejudice

HRT3M1:

- **CM3. The Moral Life:** identify moral norms as a natural expression of one's faith, the expressions of moral norms (promotion of peace and global solidarity), and explore models of advocacy of various faith groups in one's own community (e.g., examination of social conscience).

HRF301:

- **CM3: The Moral Life:** Identify moral norms as a natural expression of one's faith, the expressions of moral norms (promotion of peace and global solidarity), and explore models of advocacy of various faith groups in one's own community (e.g., examination of social conscience).

HRE4O1:

- **CM2. Seeking Understanding:** Apply a contemporary Catholic understanding of conscience to the process of conscience formation and moral decision-making
- **CM2.2:** examine how Scripture, Tradition and the teaching authority of the Church, inform conscience formation and moral decision-making

HRE4M1:

- **PF3.1:** show understanding of happiness as an effect of choosing "the good" (not fleeting, selfish pleasure) and how as the "reward of virtue" and living in communion with God's people through Baptism; also, show how our understanding of happiness impacts the way we live
- **PF3.2:** explain how Christians have a "call story" rooted in God to work for justice and peace; also show how key tenets in Catholic social doctrine ground our identity in God and help us honour the gifts of diverse cultures
- **PF3.3:** critique, with theological reflection using Catholic social teaching, some social, political, and economic structures in Western culture
- **CM1.4:** explain the importance of God's objective moral truth as the loving final authority in formation of conscience, especially within a culture of moral relativism; also explain how we can discover God's objective moral truth, and the double duty of forming and following one's conscience
- **CM1.5:** describe "self-mastery" and show why reason should govern, but not repress, human passions; also, explain how the grace of our life in Christ heals these consequences of original sin: "moral blind spots", and "concupiscence"
- **CM2.3:** explain how witnessing the joy of the Gospel through virtuous choices involves rightly assessing the goodness of the object, circumstances, and intention of moral acts
- **CM3.3:** evaluate a variety of moral issues in modern culture through a Catholic lens using the criteria of object, circumstances, and intention,

indicating how good moral acts increase community happiness and wholeness through respect for human dignity

Catholic Graduate Expectations

1. A discerning believer formed in the Catholic Faith Community who:
 - d. Develops attitudes and values founded on Catholic social teaching and acts to promote social responsibility, human solidarity, and the common good
3. A reflective, creative, and holistic thinker who:
 - a. Recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential in facing all challenges
4. A self-directed, responsible lifelong learner who:
 - f. Applies effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, time and resource management skills
 - g. Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities, and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities

Learning Goals

Through a variety of collaborative learning activities and experiences, students will work together to:

- Understand the meaning of the informed conscience as illuminated by our Catholic faith;
- Examine the concept of the human person and how it relates to the informed conscience;
- Examine their roles as Catholics formed in their faith and how to demonstrate that faith through correct application of the informed conscience
- Understand, appreciate, apply, and communicate their learning in the context of a contemporary issue and/or context (i.e. stewardship), so that
- They can present their learning in a comprehensive presentation mode of their choice

Teacher Notes

Please refer to the Front Matter of this resource for detailed information regarding lesson facilitation.

The following materials are components of this lesson:

Informed Conscience slide deck ([English](#)) ([French](#))

Informed Conscience - Stewardship slide deck ([English](#)) ([French](#))

Informed Conscience - [Stewardship Visio Divina images](#)
Informed Conscience - Stewardship Visio Divina script ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Conscience Cards Activity ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Environmental Conscience Cards Activity ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Well-Informed or Ill-Informed Conscience Brainstorm Sheet ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Summary of Main Points of Conscience Lesson ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Article - *The Pope Might Make Destroying the Earth a Sin* ([English](#)) ([French](#))
Presentation Assignment - Conscience ([English](#)) ([French](#))

Prayer

Loving God,
You have given us gifts of immeasurable worth, which help us to discern and understand the vastness of Your creation, and none is more powerful or necessary than our ability to reason. You gave us this gift so that we could tell the difference between what is right and wrong, and to help us to always do what is right in Your eyes. At times, we stumble and move away from You through our actions, but we know that You are always there to forgive us and to show us the light of Your wisdom. Help us to seek truth, develop our conscience and come to have a deeper faith, so that we may always do what is right, just, and pleasing in Your sight.

We ask all this in the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Lesson

Minds On (10-15 minutes)

The **Conscience Cards** are to be utilized as part of the Minds On activity, in order to get students talking about how to exercise their critical thinking skills when discerning the best course of action. The instructions can also be found in the Informed Conscience slide deck ([English](#) & [French](#)).

The teacher will need to print and cut out the cards, enough sets for each pair of students in the class.

Conscience Cards - [English](#)

Conscience Cards - [French](#)

Students are invited to select a partner for this activity. Once they are in their pairs, students will be given a set of 10 conscience cards, with different scenarios on them (some simpler and some more complex scenarios). Students are asked to read through the scenarios with their partner, and decide if they would **act** in the manner posed at the end of each scenario, or if they would **avoid** acting in that manner.

Students are asked to create two piles: **ACT & AVOID.**

Once they have created their piles, students are asked to discuss **why** they have chosen that particular category for that card. I.e. they should engage in dialogue with their partner about the reasons why they would act or avoid that particular action. This activity is meant to prepare them for the upcoming discussions about informed and misinformed conscience, and it also helps them to explore their motives for certain actions.

Once students are back in the large group, invite them, using a Butterfly Pass, to share their rationale for **2** of the cards (one for ACT and one for AVOID). This will allow them to also hear their peers' reasoning for particular actions.

Learning Activities

A. Informed Conscience

The Informed Conscience slide deck ([English](#) & [French](#)), based on information from the Grade 12 textbook, [In Search of the Good](#) (Chapter 3), provides the requisite information for students to understand the various components of an informed conscience:

- The definition from the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- The 3 senses of conscience
- Understanding the conscience as a compass/GPS
- The factors which inform the conscience
- The six types of misinformation of the conscience
- The S.T.O.P. model for decision making

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) states that:

- **1783** Conscience must be informed and moral judgement enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgement and to reject authoritative teachings.
- **1784** The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart.
- **1785** In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

The activities explained below are also included in the instructional slide deck.

Reminder: Since this material can be utilized for Grades 9-12, it is up to the teacher's discretion to gauge how much of this material aligns with the curriculum expectations for their particular grade.

Thinking Classroom Strategies

This activity can also be found in the Informed Conscience instructional slide deck.

Using a random name generator (such as [Random Lists](#), [Class Tools](#), or [Picker Wheel](#)), place students into small groups (3-4 people). Give each group a copy of the Well-Informed or Ill-Informed Conscience ([English](#) or [French](#)) activity sheet. Working together, students are to brainstorm a moral scenario/dilemma, and provide two different courses of action:

- One course of action to demonstrate how someone with a *well-informed* conscience would proceed
- One course of action to demonstrate how someone with an *ill-informed* conscience would proceed

Students can either work with a copy of the sheet, or can use vertical non-permanent surfaces in order to write out their responses. Each group should provide a clear and concise description of the action, while trying to include as many variables as possible. Please remind them that the first part of the exercise is to focus **solely** on the actual action, and the motivations which would have preceded it. They should also include those who could be potentially directly or indirectly affected by the action.

As they consider the actions of the ill-informed conscience, ask students to discuss the ways in which the misinformation of the conscience would occur in their original scenario (i.e. would the person *rationalize* their actions, would they say that *the ends justify the means*, etc), and ask them to explain their choice(s). Please remind students that they should be following conversational norms, and that respect of the opinions and thoughts of others is paramount during an exercise such as this. They are not meant to come to a final and complete consensus, but they are meant to consider the factors that impact actions and contemplate the potential consequences.

Once they have determined these two possibilities (the path that the informed conscience follows and the path that the misinformed conscience follows), ask students to consider even further: what are the potential consequences for the well-informed and ill-informed decisions? What can a person do in order to make better decisions? Which sources of information can be sought out in order to assist with this understanding?

B. Developing Inquiry Questions - Stewardship

Once the material for the lesson has been discussed, students can then begin to consider the application of the informed conscience to the principle of stewardship.

If the teacher wishes to include more information regarding Stewardship, then the materials from the Living Laudato Si' and Laudate Deum lesson can be used

before beginning the next part of the lesson.

Before engaging in the Thinking Classroom strategies for this aspect of the lesson, the teacher is invited to engage the students in a contemplative and prayerful exercise, Visio Divina. This is to help students meditate upon what it means to be a steward of the earth, as God commanded (Genesis 1:26). Instructions for the Visio Divina can be found in the script below, and the various images are also included, both in a PDF file and on Canva. The Gallery Walk Images should be printed out in colour and displayed in the classroom, with enough space between them so that there isn't too much crowding if several students cluster around a particular image. Some calm, meditative instrumental music could also be played in the background as students slowly walk around the classroom.

Visio Divina Gallery Walk Images ([PDF](#))

Visio Divina Gallery Walk Script ([English](#)) ([French](#))

Once students have returned to their seats, the teacher can use the Stewardship Slide Deck (below) to engage students in developing and exploring inquiry questions related to the call to stewardship, and how to best take care of our common home. [Catholic Central](#) has a very informative video to help students understand the Scriptural and theological foundations of the call to stewardship; this video could be shown to the students after the Visio Divina Gallery Walk. As with all suggested media, the teacher should take some time to preview the suggested videos to ensure that they are appropriate for the class.

Stewardship Slide Deck - [English](#)

Stewardship Slide Deck - [French](#)

Three sheets of chart paper should be posted in the classroom, with the italicized questions below clearly written, one question on each piece of chart paper. Students should be provided with sticky notes and writing implements so that they can provide their answers to the questions anonymously on the chart paper. This will also create a sort of "gallery walk" of their responses, as they will be asked to engage in conversation with their peers about what they read on the various sticky notes.

After a brief review of the informed conscience (slide 1), students are invited to consider the following question:

→ *How can I reduce my carbon footprint, given the threat of climate change?*

Please ask students to provide a response on a sticky note, and then to post their note on the appropriate chart paper. Once the majority of students have provided a response, please ask them to take a few moments to read the responses from their peers. Using the questions on slide 4, ask students to discuss the responses with their classmates, and try to delve deeper into possible ways to address the question at hand.

A brief review of the S.T.O.P. model of decision making is provided, so that students have the information readily on hand, along with the sources which can

help them to make properly informed decisions about how to care for the earth.

Using the sticky notes and writing implements again, students are invited to consider the next question, which is a development of the initial question:

→ *How can I reduce my carbon footprint, so that I can show more respect for God's creation?*

Ask students to contemplate what has changed with this question, and why the differentiation is important to us as Catholics. Again, please ask students to provide a response on a sticky note, and then to post their note on the appropriate chart paper. Once the majority of students have provided a response, please ask them to take a few moments to read the responses from their peers. Using the questions on slide 4, ask students to discuss the responses with their classmates, and try to delve deeper into possible ways to address the question at hand.

At this time, students will be asked to conduct a critical reading of the article, "The Pope Might Make Destroying the Earth a Sin" ([English](#) or [French](#)). Using the information provided in the slides regarding confirmation bias, evaluating texts, and utilizing literacy skills, ask students to read through the article and then, with a partner, discuss the following questions (slide 18):

- What is the author's purpose?
- What is the author's message? Is it delivered effectively?
- What does the author seem to believe or value?
- What clues tell you so?
- How do you feel about those beliefs or values?

Once students have finished discussing these questions, ask them why, as Catholics, it is important that we do the best we can to take care of our earth. Afterwards, engage them in a conversation about the incorporation of numeracy skills into their research. (slides 21-24). Based on their examination of the provided graphs, what information can students glean which can help them with their understanding of the importance of stewardship? What can objective, factual data add to our call to be caretakers of the earth?

Finally, pose one more question to students, using sticky notes and writing implements again:

→ *Do we ultimately become better people by being more considerate and aware of our impact on the environment?*

Ask students to contemplate what has changed with this question, and why the differentiation is important to us as Catholics. How does what they have read and the objective data they have explored help them to better answer the question, now that it is in this format? Again, please ask students to provide a response on a sticky note, and then to post their note on the appropriate chart paper. Once the majority of students have provided a response, please ask them to take a few moments to read the responses from their peers. Using the questions on slide 4,

ask students to discuss the responses with their classmates, and try to delve deeper into possible ways to address the question at hand.

C. Delving Deeper Inquiry and Reflection

Similar to the **Minds On** activity above, students will be asked to work with a partner (a classmate with whom they have not yet worked throughout this lesson) to discuss the questions provided on the Environmental Conscience Cards ([English](#)) ([French](#)). The teacher will need to print and cut out the cards, enough sets for each pair of students in the class. Considering the complexity of the questions provided on these cards, students should focus on only **2** of the cards and discuss them in detail with their partner. These cards are meant to be a further exercise of their critical thinking skills, in light of the discussions, readings, and analyses that have already taken place. As part of their discussion, students should provide their reasoning for their choices. The Environmental Conscience Cards will be used for the Consolidation/Culminating activity (below).

Suggested Media

[SNL - Plagiarism](#) (misinformation of conscience) (6:08)

[Catholic Central - Care for the Environment](#) (stewardship) (6:30)

[Catholic Central - Formation of Conscience](#) (6:54)

[Ascension Presents - Do I Have a Good Conscience?](#) (11:42)

Consolidation/Culminating

Class Presentation

Using a random name generator (such as [Random Lists](#), [Class Tools](#), or [Picker Wheel](#)), place students into small groups (3-4 people). Provide them with a copy of the instructions for the Culminating Activity, “Formation of Conscience from a Catholic Perspective” ([English](#) or [French](#)). In their small groups, students are to once again consider the scenarios presented on the Environmental Conscience Cards, and they are to select only **1** scenario which they wish to explore for their class presentation.

The purpose of the assessment is to gain an understanding of conscience through the lens of the Church’s teachings and its application to environmental issues. Students will be responsible for presenting a detailed analysis on their chosen group topic that is directly related to the environment. The presentation must include information that answers the questions on the assessment sheet and the presentation should also include information about conscience from a Catholic perspective.

Remind students about the application of literacy and numeracy skills to their research, and that their presentation should be rooted in factual evidence and correct information.

Students are to utilize vertical, non-permanent surfaces as they research, analyze,

and consider their responses to the provided questions, and they should be challenged to find ways in which to engage their peers in the subject matter.

Additional Resources

Catholic Culture, [“Forming a Catholic Conscience”](#)

EWTN, [“Conscience and Its Formation”](#)

EWTN, [“Catholic Teaching on Conscience and Dissent”](#)

National Catholic Reporter, [“What do we know about how Catholics inform their consciences?”](#)

Jane Marsh, [Real Life Environmental Ethics Examples to Make You Think](#)

Greater Good Magazine, [Four Ways Teachers Can Help Students Develop a Conscience](#)

References

Environmental Conscience Cards Activity based on [Environment Conversation Questions](#)

CCCB, [In Search of the Good](#)

[Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

Peter Liljedahl, [The Thinking Classroom for Mathematics](#)