Aims
The aim of this resource is for pupils to engage with the Biblical Creation story by reading the text and looking closely at some medieval stained glass panels that depict the seven days of creation. They can use this to discuss different interpretations of the story and the implications it has for Christians. Pupils can then use the images to create their own piece of art inspired by the Creation story of Genesis.

Background information to the Creation Resource
John Thornton, a stained glass artist from Coventry, designed a series of creation panels within the Great East Window of York Minster. The window is one of the largest medieval stained glass windows in the country, around the size of a tennis court! The window shows the beginning and end of all things with the figure of God at the very top. It includes stories from the first book of the Bible, Genesis and images from the last book of the Bible, The Revelation of St John (sometimes called the Apocalypse). John Thornton was paid a total of £46 plus a £10 bonus if he completed the work in three years. Although this doesn’t sound a great deal, it would have been a huge amount in those days, for example the equivalent of 11 years’ salary for a standard glazier. We know he did accomplish this because the dates on the window state 1405 – 1408. We still have the original contract from 1405 and Thornton was responsible for drawing out (cartooning) all the images himself.

See the York Glazier’s Trust for more information about the window.
John Thornton has interpreted the seven days of creation from Genesis Chapter 1. The images can be downloaded from the website along with this document.

You can also find the images and more information on the York Glaziers Stained Glass Navigator.

**Question prompts to help pupils interpret the pictures**

- What can you see?
- What is the artist portraying in this image?
- Do you recognise any characters in these pictures?
- What do you like? Not like?
- What does the picture make you feel?
- Which panel do you most connect with? Why?
- How are light, colour, and lines used?
- How is God portrayed in these panels?
- What do you think the men on the pillars might represent?
- What animals would you have included in Day Six if you were John Thornton?
- How might you have interpreted the text differently?
- What is effective? What might you change?
- What questions might you have for the artist?
- How effective is John Thornton at depicting the ‘Fall’ of Adam and Eve?
- How does God’s creation come into being? (What does he do?).
- What does the story teach Christians about God?
- What does God create on the first day and the fourth day? Why is this interesting?
- What do you think being ‘made in the image of God’ might mean? What might it teach Christians?
- The Creation is described as ‘good’. How might Christians act as stewards of God’s Creation to keep the world good?
- Which sentences are repeated. Why might this be?
Activities for pupils to engage with the creation images

Observe and describe
In pairs, choose one panel. Take turns to close their eyes whilst their partner describes the panel in as much detail as they can for one minute. Then swap over.

Observe and remember
The class is split into groups. The teacher chooses one picture panel and faces it away from the class. One person from each group has a minute to observe the panel closely. They then go back to their group and start to draw what they can remember. After a minute, another member of the group has a turn to observe the picture and then return to add more detail. Continue until all pupils in the group have had a go. Then turn around the picture so that the groups can compare their drawing to the image. How accurate were they? You can extend this activity by the observer having to describe what they remember rather than draw it so that others in the group can sketch what they are describing.

Creative Activities

• The teacher reads the creation story out loud, and pupils record what they hear using only images and symbols. They then take turns in pairs re-telling the story using their images as prompts.
• Re-create one of John Thornton’s images as accurately as possible.
• Using one of the Bible passages, create an image that represents one day in the creation story.
• Create an image/cartoon that represents the seven days of creation.
• Create an abstract image that represents the idea of God creating the world.
• Write a creation story inspired by the Bible using creative and/or poetic language and structure.
• Create a model (clay/cardboard/Lego etc.) that represents the story of creation.
• Make an animation to represent the seven days of creation.
• Hold a philosophical debate about whether humans are born sinful or not.
Points to consider when discussing the text

- Christians believe the Bible is authoritative because it is the ‘Word of God’.
- Some Christians see this story as a literal interpretation of the beginning of the world.
- Some Christians accept the idea of seven days of creation, but believe it happened over a longer period of time. The Hebrew for ‘day’ can be translated as ‘a period of time’. In which case you can combine the timeline of the creation story with the timeline of Evolution.
- Some Christians understand the story as a type of literature, a creation myth rather than a literal account. There are devices such as repetition and light is created on day 1 whereas the sun, moon and stars are created on day 4. As such it is not seen as a literal, scientific account, rather it tells us how people in the past understood the world and what their purpose on the Earth might be.
- There are two versions of the Creation story in Genesis. Genesis 1 details the seven days of creation whereas Genesis 2, focuses on Adam and Eve, how they were created, the temptation and disobedience (The Fall).
- Genesis 1 talks of God creating male and female together. Genesis 2 includes the story of Eve being created from the side of Adam.
- There are many creation myths from around the world that start off with darkness or chaos from which a god or gods then bring order and creation.
- ‘The Fall’ is so significant in Christianity because without it there would be no need for the sacrifice of Christ on the cross to redeem humanity.
- Some religions and cultures wouldn’t include any depictions of God, Jesus or Angels or even humans and animals. Sensitivity may therefore be needed when using this resource.
Ideas for further research

• **The Great East Window.** Look at the Great East Window in the Stained Glass Navigator and see if you can find more images of God. How do these compare with the creation images?

• **Dextera Dei (the right hand of God).** Most of the panels depict God’s hand. Research the background to this imagery and think about why the hand is used to portray God.

• **Creation myths from around the world.** Find examples of other creation myths from around the world and compare their similarities and differences to the Biblical account for example the Chinese and Babylonians are good places to start.

• **Climate and Creation.** The text of Genesis calls on human beings to care for God's creation and everything in it, because what God created was ‘good’. Research the work of Christian Aid or Tear Fund for practical ways that Christians can make a difference.

• **Jesus as ‘The Word’.** Research John 1 verses 1-3. Find out how John connects Jesus to the creation of the world.

• **The Abrahamic Religions.** Research how Judaism and Islam interpret the creation story and the Fall of Adam and Eve.

• **St William.** Have a look on the stained glass navigator at the St William Window which is thought to have also been designed and created by John Thornton. It depicts scenes from the life of William Fitzherbert of York. Find out who he was and why he is so significant for the Minster.

• **Science and Religion.** The Book of Genesis has long been a contested text in relation to our scientific understanding of the world. But many Christians interpret the Book of Genesis as a way to understand our purpose, why are we here, and what are we here for. Use BBC Bitesize to find out more.

Outcomes

Please feel free to email learning@yorkminster.org with examples of creative work that are inspired by this resource.