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How small we are

Aim:

- To encourage pupils to consider the power of the natural world and the smallness of humanity

Introduction

Scientific discoveries

Leader:

Aren't scientists amazing?

Reader 1:

At around 6pm on March 18th the spacecraft New Horizons crossed the orbit of Uranus, more than 1.8 billion miles from earth. Launched in 2006 and the fastest spacecraft ever built, New Horizons will rendezvous with Pluto in 2015 before heading into the unknown.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Horizons

Leader:

Aren't scientists amazing?

Reader 2:

The Hadron Collider, a huge internationally designed scientific instrument built underground near the Swiss city of Geneva is

intended, amongst other things, to recreate the conditions experienced in the Big Bang, the moment scientists believe our Universe came into being.

Leader:

Aren't scientists amazing?

Reader 3:

Cancer is no longer a death sentence for many people who a decade ago would have little chance of survival. Every day there are new breakthroughs in treatment which mean that cancer is now, for many, a treatable disease.

Leader:

Aren't scientists amazing?

Reader 4:

Nuclear power offers the world a permanent solution to energy issues. It is a viable and renewable alternative to many of our uses of limited resources of carbon fuels, tapping into the energy locked into the atom itself.

Looking Deeper

The power of the natural world

Leader:

Aren't scientists amazing? At least they are until the limits of human understanding and power become apparent.

Japan has recently been rocked by one of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in the area. This didn't catch the Japanese people unaware. Buildings had been designed to withstand the effect of such an earthquake, particularly those buildings such as nuclear reactors that offered an element of risk to the population



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if damage occurred. The scientists and architects did their job well, for every reactor safely survived the quake itself.

What the scientists weren't able to factor in to their safety plans was the gigantic tsunami, the huge wall of water that knocked out power supplies, rendering the safety mechanisms at some reactors ineffective.

Water flooded backup generators. Battery power lasted for only a few brief hours. This was the cause of the present nuclear crisis that has overtaken Japan, a developed country, just like ours. The scientists have been truly amazing in what they've achieved, but not amazing enough to cope with the sheer power of the natural world.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_power_in_Japan

One of the Psalms, the songs and poems that form part of the Old Testament of the Bible, contains this idea:

Reader 1:

When I look up at the sky you've made, at the moon and stars that you put in place, it makes me think "What are human beings, that you even give them a thought, what are mere men and women, that you care for them?"

(Psalm 8: 3-4 paraphrase)

Leader:

We may consider that the achievements of scientists are amazing, and it would be true. I don't want to belittle any of these advances. But humanity is still a very small part of a huge universe. It may be you see God at the centre of that universe, like the writer of the Psalms. It may be that you only see the vastness of space. The conclusion is the same. A little humility, and a change of perspective, helps us see the reality of here and now, and motivates us to achieve even more.

Reflection

If you could make a scientific advance, what would it be?

How would it benefit humanity?

Prayer

God the Creator

We are amazed at what we see around us of the wonder of your work.

Help us, as day by day, we seek to understand it more.

Grant us wisdom to use our discoveries well.
Amen

Thought for the day

How little I am in it all

Key words

Scientific discovery

Japan

Earthquake

Tsunami

Humility