



Introducing humanism

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Hello. Welcome to 'Introducing humanism: non-religious approaches to life'.

I'm Sandi Toksvig and I'll be leading you through this course.

So, why me? Well, I'm a humanist, I'm a patron of Humanists UK - so that ticks the 'humanist' box. And I'm a parent and a grandparent who would love some answers of my own to life's big questions... you know - before the kids ask me.

Life's big questions, which we will be exploring throughout this course:

'What sort of a thing am I?',
'How can I know what is true?',
'How should I live?',
'How should I treat others?',
and 'What kind of world do I want?'

I think it's vital everyone gets the opportunity to explore different approaches to these questions, but also that we have the freedom to decide on the answers for ourselves.

There will be other educators throughout the course, including academics and experts who will support your learning. You'll also find contributions from humanist campaigners, celebrants, pastoral carers, and members of the public to help widen your understanding of what it means to be one of the millions of humanists living in the UK and around the world today.

When people ask me, 'What is a humanist?', sometimes I want to say, 'It's just common sense.' Thinking carefully about what to believe. Treating other people with warmth and respect. Making the most of life.

However, it's not common sense to everyone, and a fuller understanding of humanism involves more than that.

Interested people tend to focus on the things I don't believe in: a god, an afterlife, a set of divinely ordained rules we have to live by.

But in this course we will be concentrating primarily on the things that humanists do believe and the reasons why they believe that. We'll also be exploring the values they hold and investigating the way they live their lives.

Being a humanist can be demanding. It means, when deciding what to believe or how to act, you have to do the thinking for yourself. You have to take responsibility for your own life. You have to take on what, for some, can appear like uncomfortable facts about reality.

But it can also be enormously rewarding. It can be liberating and life-enhancing.

By the end of the course you may decide you agree with the arguments humanists put forward. You may share the belief that their approach to life is one that makes the most of our capacities as human beings. You may, on the other hand, conclude that humanism is naive, mistaken, or dangerous. Either way you will not be alone. Whatever you conclude, you should have developed a better understanding of why humanists believe and value the things they do and how they tackle life's biggest questions.

I hope you enjoy the course.