Telling a Story with Pictures

I often tell Bible stories without using pictures at all. My careful description of the event, dramatic inflections of my voice and appropriate gestures help the listener form mental pictures in their own minds that are better than any I could draw on my own.

Sometimes I let the children draw their own pictures (see Draw and Tell Visual Aids Made by Children). Besides being a great way for children to express themselves the pictures give me an insight into whether or not I have communicated the story well. The pictures also often reveal the child's understanding and reaction to God's word and I learn a lot from that.

But, if I find really good illustrations from other sources I like to use them. The old saying "a picture says a thousand words" is particularly true with illustrations of Bible events and I want to make sure the "words" the picture is saying are true to what God is saying. For this reason I am careful in using such illustrations. Here are some tips:

- **The illustration should be biblically correct.** If the Bible describes people, settings and actions then the picture needs to depict them as it is written in the Bible. Occasionally I will use a picture that strays from this in a small way but I am careful to point that out to the child I am showing it to.
- **The illustration should be age appropriate.**   Children are quick to tell you that they are not "babies". A picture that looks too childish for the age you are teaching shows a lack of respect on your part. But, on the other extreme graphic pictures can be too mature for a younger child and they could be traumatised in some way like having bad dreams. A picture that alludes to the event is more appropriate for young children.
- **Facial expressions should make sense.** The stories of the Bible involve many different emotions and children study the facial expressions in illustrations to make judgements about the characters. (Note the angry expressions of the synagogue leaders in the picture above. I used this picture in teaching the story of the Stoning of Stephen.)
  And not every story has a "happy ending" for every character. For instance, if you are telling a bible story that involves suffering or temptation it would not make sense for the characters to have smiling faces. This trivialises the Word of God and does not actually prepare children for real life situations that Christians face.
- **Illustrations should reflect the culture and time period of the event.** Artistic license allows an artist to interpret events into modern-day settings. I personally enjoy some of this artwork but children are usually more literal in their thinking so they can be confused by this. For this reason I try to use illustrations that depict the biblical characters in clothes and settings of the time in which the event took place.
- **A few illustrations can be better than many.** One good illustration might be enough to use while you tell the entire story. As a teacher you could cover up part of the picture and reveal it in stages or simply point to different parts as you tell the story. You might even choose to combine the visual aid with a craft or other activity. Try these ideas at New Ways to Use Simple Colouring Pictures.
- **No picture can replace good teaching.** Finally, remember this…even if you choose perfect illustrations you must not depend on them to tell the entire story. Children need to hear God's Word for a growing faith.

Free Illustrations from Sweet Publishing

Today I wanted to share with you a great resource for illustrations that I have stumbled upon. It is found at https://www.unfoldingword.org/sweet-publishing/. Good quality illustrations can be downloaded and used in an

unlimited number of ways. Sweet Publishing has made a vast number of illustrations available for public use and free of charge. The terms of use say

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The user can even distribute the works as long as they are attributed to Sweet Publishing according to the instructions provided. I've been working on lessons from the Book of Acts and have used the illustrations for slide shows and visual aids. I'll include them below and am quite happy to attribute them to http://sweetpublishing.com.

I hope you will give the Illustration Website a try and use the illustrations as you share the Word of God with children.

Illustrations from "Free Bible Images"

Another wonderful resource for visual aids is http://www.freebibleimages.org/ If you have used the illustrations from Sweet Publishing then you will notice that Free Bible Images has made use of many of their illustrations.

At this website you will find downloadable flip charts and illustrations for many Bible Stories. I like that you can download in a number of formats. When you download you will be asked to agree to their terms of use. These are generally quite generous but you will need to read each one.