How to Choose Illustrations



Pictures communicate emotions, context, and meaning. Despite what you say as you tell the story, the pictures you choose will tell children a lot about God and people. For this reason, be carefully choose the illustrations you'll use to tell the story:

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. You might occasionally use a picture that strays from this in a small way, but make sure to point that out to the children.

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 may be too frightened or have 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. This picture was used to teach 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. You might personally enjoy some of this artwork, but children are usually more literal in their thinking and can be confused by this. For this reason, try to use illustrations that depict the biblical characters in clothes and settings of the time in which the event took place.

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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.

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Free Illustrations from Sweet Publishing

Below is a great resource for illustrations. 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

> "These free Bible illustrations are © Sweet Publishing and are made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license."

The user can even distribute the works as long as they are attributed to Sweet Publishing according to the instructions provided. Mission Bible Class uses many of their illustrations in the sideshows accompanying each lesson. These are attributed to Sweet Publishing. Give the illustrations a try and use them 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. Something helpful about their site is that you can download files in a number of formats. When you download files, you will be asked to agree to their terms of use. These are generally quite generous but you should read each one.

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