Storytelling Methods

Overview

Good storytelling accentuates the meaning of Scripture without adding to it or causing the children's minds to veer off in a different direction.

Adding a visual element to your storytelling helps children process the information they receive. Visual aids also help children focus on the story, as well as make sense of abstract concepts. Without visual aids, it can be challenging for children to understand abstract concepts because of their age and developmental differences.

Before using any visual aids, first read what the Bible has to say. If you read the Scripture and then outline the Bible story, you will be more likely to use visual aids in ways that best convey the Bible's original meaning.

How to Tell a Story

And remember…try something new!

1. Telling a Story with Pictures
2. Costumed Story Teller
3. Sock Puppets
4. Spoon and Finger Puppets
5. Shadow Puppets
6. Use Natural Objects as Visual Aids
7. Draw as You Tell the Story
8. Draw and Tell (children draw their own visual aids)
9. Puzzles for Teaching
10. Stand-up Figures
11. Storytelling Boxes

1. Telling a Story with Pictures

Materials:

Printed pictures



Directions:

One of the most common ways to tell a story is to use illustrations so the children can see them as you speak. New teachers often like this method because words can be written on the reverse side of the pictures to help the nervous teacher remember what to say.

Unfortunately, this is also one of the most overused methods, and the temptation for the teacher is to under-prepare and then be forced to read the words with little emotion or eye contact. Refer to How to Choose Illustrations for instructions and links to free illustrations. Here are some common ways to use illustrations:

- Print the pictures onto paper and make a "flip chart" or album.

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- Show the pictures on your phone, tablet, computer or projection screen. I would highly suggest that you download the pictures beforehand and have full battery power. Showing them straight from the internet can result in problems such as lagged download time or loss of connection.
- Use PowerPoint or a similar program to create any number of visual aid presentations. Check here for instructions and examples of PowerPoint slideshows.

2. Costumed Story Teller



Materials:

Costumes

Directions:

Dress up as one of the story's characters and tell the story from that character's point of view. Your costume might be as simple as a head covering made from a towel or pillowcase that you place on your head with a man's tie for a headband. You could also let the children take turns being the characters during a time of review. Click here for instructions for making simple costumes.

3. Sock Puppets

Materials:

Sock, needle and thread (or fabric glue), scissors, items to form facial features and hair (yarn, buttons, felt, craft eyes, etc.)

Directions:

Use the materials listed above to decorate the sock to represent a Bible character you have chosen. Then use the puppet to tell or review the story from a different point of view. For example, tell the story of the fiery furnace from Daniel's point of view or from the guard's point of view.

Instead of using a sock, you could cut off the fingers of a glove and decorate them as puppets. There are some easy directions online in places such as wikihow.com

4. Spoon and Finger Puppets

Materials:

Pen, paper, scissors, tape, markers, plastic spoons

Directions:

Draw puppets directly on pads of fingers, draw puppets on paper and attach to fingers or draw faces on the backs of plastic spoons. Use these to tell the story or to ask the children review questions. Instructions for making Spoon or Finger Puppets.

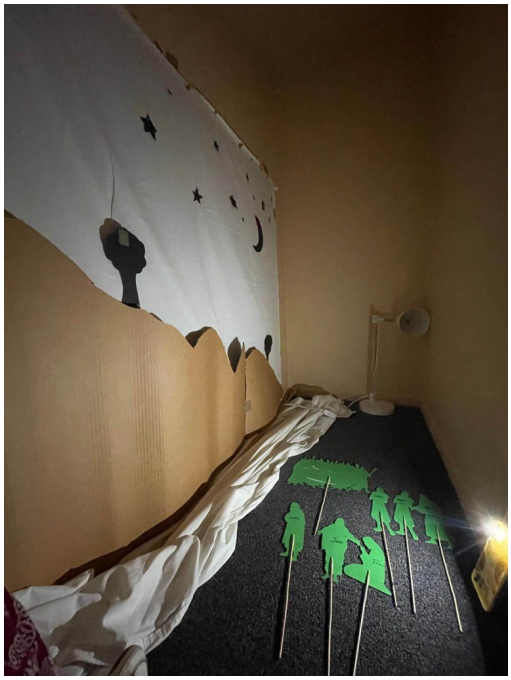
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5. Shadow Puppets

Materials:

White sheet/fabric, paper cut-outs, long skewer, flashlight or lamp





Directions:

Tell the story by making puppets out of story characters' silhouettes and having them act out the story.

First, find a place where you can hang up a white sheet/fabric. You will need to be able to sit behind it.

Then, choose the characters you want to be present in the story, and draw an outline of them on paper. Cut out these outlines, and glue or tape them to a wooden skewer so you can hold them.

Turn on a flashlight or lamp, and place it behind the sheet, where you will be sitting. Then, hold up the character puppets and use them to act out the story as you tell it.

Consider taping other outlines of scenery or objects to the sheet to set the scene of the story.

top

6. Use Natural Objects as Visual Aids

Materials:

Natural materials such as rocks, grass, leaves, shells, etc.

Directions:

Use natural objects as you tell the story when possible. If you only tell stories using pictures on laptops or printed flip charts, the children may or may not ever see those pictures again. On the other hand, if you talk about removing the stone from the empty tomb while showing a rock you found on the church grounds, chances are greater that the children will see those same kinds of rocks throughout their lives and remember the story of the empty tomb.

The same can be said of the many natural objects around us, like a weed to remember the parable of the soils or wood and nails to remember the cross. When children see these natural objects in real life, they are more likely to recall the story and what they learned about God, allowing them to connect with Him and His story throughout their lives.

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7. Draw as You Tell the Story

Materials:

Paper/whiteboard/sand, pencil/pen/marker/stick

Directions:

Children usually love it when a teacher attempts to draw the story. Either they are impressed with your artistic abilities or will feel empathy for your efforts. Even if they laugh, you can be satisfied that you at least have their attention! Don't be afraid to make yourself vulnerable to your students in this way.

The beauty of this method is that you can draw anywhere: on a chalkboard, paper, or even with a stick in the sand.

Before you teach the lesson, plan out the picture(s) you want to draw. Keep your plan simple and be minimalistic. Don't add to the truth of the Bible to be "cute." If you get carried away by the details of a picture, then you are probably losing focus on what the lesson is actually about.

Simple and quick line drawings or stick figures can convey a lesson well. Children enjoy trying to draw figures themselves. Stick figures are highly underrated.

- Some patterns and examples for stick figures can be found here.
- Patterns for Drawing Simple Bible Characters. Print on A4 size paper.
- Patterns for Drawing Simple Bible Characters. Print on letter size paper.

8. Draw and Tell (children draw their own visual aids)

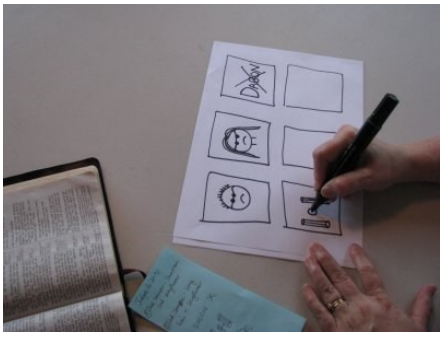
Materials:

Paper, marker/pen

Alternatives: whiteboard, sand, sidewalk/footpath and chalk, newspaper, etc.

Directions:

Before the lesson, plan how you will divide the story into "scenes." Mark off that many numbered squares (or any shapes) on paper so that children will be able to draw the appropriate number of scenes.



As you tell the story, ask the children to draw something in each box. For example, Scene 1-Joseph lived in Egypt, so draw a picture of something you might see in Egypt (like pyramids or mummies). Scene 2-Joseph was Pharaoh's special helper, and he wore Pharaoh's ring (draw a hand with a ring on it), etc.

You will need to do a trial run before teaching so that you will be prepared. For fun, you can do this same exercise on a chalkboard, on big sheets of newsprint, on the footpath/sidewalk with chalk, in the sand or with any other surface or materials at your disposal. Instructions and examples of this method can be found here.

9. Puzzles for Teaching

Materials:

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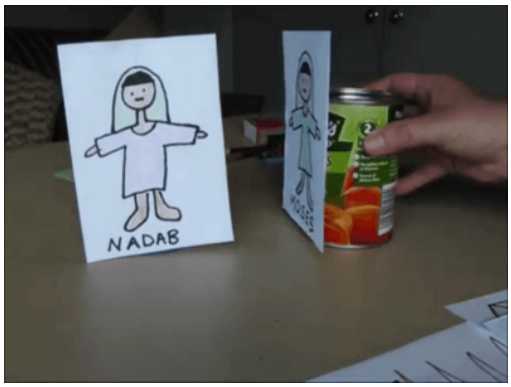
Picture, scissors



Directions:

Take a picture you would use for a visual aid and cut it into pieces, and then let the children put it back together like a puzzle. You can also tell the story using these puzzle pieces. Click here to learn how.

10. Stand-up Figures





Materials:

Paper or plastic cups, pen/marker

Directions:

Draw simple characters from the Bible Story and attach them to upturned paper or plastic cups. These characters can be used to “act out” the story. More instructions and examples can be found here.

Alternatively, try using dolls and even blocks of wood or stones instead; these can easily become characters in the imagination of a child.

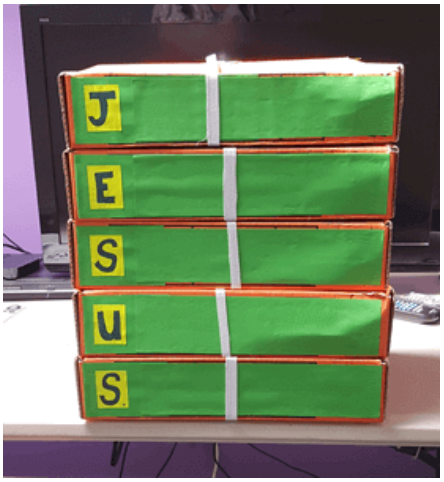
11. Storytelling Boxes

Materials:

Boxes, various small objects

Directions:

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Place an object that represents the lesson's story inside a box, and close it. Before starting the lesson, ask the children to guess what is inside the box for the day. Then, let them open the box, see inside, and guess how the object relates to that day's Bible story. For example, if you make a box for each chapter of Acts, Acts 1 might include cotton for the Ascension, Acts 2 might include a matchbox for Pentecost, etc. Use this as a way to tell the story, or as a review game.

12. Godly Play

Godly Play is a slow, reflective type of storytelling. You and the children sit in a circle, and you tell the story using simple objects that represent the setting and characters. You will tell the story slowly and reflectively, and at the end of the story, wonder out loud with the children about the story. Godly Play is a foundation that sells their own materials, but you can easily use your own objects to tell the story. For example, in our 12 Spies Godly Play-style story, we used sand, rocks, and shells to tell the story. You can be as creative as you like with the materials!

Through Godly Play storytelling, you and the children wonder together about God and who He is, and what He might be saying to you through the story. You can either learn more about the Godly Play program and use their materials, or read more about how we suggest tell the story in a Godly Play style here (additional page with information coming soon).

To learn more about Godly Play, visit https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org
To see examples of people doing Godly Play, visit
https://youtube.com/@thegodlyplayfoundation?si=UC1x0h8yGaI_lbZC

top

Date
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