

Living B.I.G. Through Bible Stories

“Miss Ann, tell me again why he climbed up that tree,” asked four-year-old Maddie.

I paused for a minute. I could try to answer the question and explain that Zacchaeus was trying to see over the heads of the crowd, or I could repeat the whole story again. It was obvious that Maddie, and perhaps others in the class, hadn't quite understood the Bible story.

And then an idea came to me. I asked Maddie to kneel down on the floor with the rest of the class standing all around her. I started to tell the story again. Maddie complained that couldn't see me. So then I had her stand on a sturdy chair so that her head was above the rest of the class, still standing around her.

I continued on with the story, pausing a couple of times to ask Maddie if she could still see me all right. Maddie suddenly understood why Zacchaeus wanted to climb up a tree—to better see Jesus. Because Maddie had been able to put herself into the experience that Zacchaeus had been in, the Bible story had come to life for her.

Of course all the other children then wanted to be Zacchaeus too, so we spent the rest of the class repeating the scene. But at the end of the class, they all really understood why Zacchaeus had climbed up that sycamore tree.

Children often need to put themselves in a story to better understand it. Participating in drama will help make the story more meaningful and more real.

There are several types of dramatic experiences that can be used in the Sunday school classroom. My favorites are interactive group experiences, news interview shows, and dramatizations of the Bible story. These can often be found in the curriculum offerings for each quarter.

Interactive Group Experiences

This drama experience allows the entire class to participate and is wonderful for pre-school and early elementary children. To begin, make sure you, as the leader, are familiar with the Bible story. As you read the story, try to imagine the scene using all of your senses. What do you want the children to see, hear, feel, smell, or taste during the experience?

News Interview Shows

This is an exciting way to involve middle and older elementary children in a Bible story. This approach works great with dramatizing the miracles of Jesus. Once again make sure you, as the leader, are familiar with the Bible story. As you read the story, consider the characters who are involved. What happens in the story, and who does it happen to? Who are the witnesses to the event?

The news interview show can be presented either as an “in-studio” production, with the

interviewer seated at a table or desk and the guests sitting next to him or her, or done “on location” with the interviewer talking to participants at the site of the event. In either situation, have the person playing the interviewer ask each character questions about what happened in the story.

Dramatization of the Bible Story

Older elementary children will find it fun and meaningful to actually write out and rehearse a scene. Ask the children to read a specific Bible story and write it out as a script. Encourage them to use their imaginations to paraphrase the dialogue. If you are working with a large class, split the children up into several groups, each working with the same story. It will be interesting to see how the different groups will present the scene.

Allow plenty of time to write and rehearse the script. Have the children think about the setting for the scene. Do they need any furniture or props? Simple costumes can be added to help with characterizations. With an old pillowcase, cut holes for the arms and head. Or take a yard of striped or textures fabric, or an old towel; fold it in half, and cut a hole for the head. Tie rope or cording around the waist for a belt. When ready, have the children perform their scene with props and costumes.

With all age groups and with all three of these drama types, remember the process is more important than the final product. But for an older class to really get involved with a news interview show or dramatization, videotape the interviews and scenes, and watch them later as a class with popcorn and lemonade for a special treat. Or invite another class or even parents to be an audience. Watching a drama performance can also bring a Bible story to life.

Maddie might have understood the story of Zacchaeus if she had seen it acted out. But I'm sure she would have responded as the other children did in my class: “When can I climb the tree?” “When can I be Zacchaeus?”

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