

Word Alive:

Storytelling for Christian Education Teachers



Please reproduce this material for educational and training activities.

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This module was created based on The Art of Storytelling by Betty Falle, originally created by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) for the "Learning Ministry Designs Binder". Used with the permission of the ELCIC.

Word Alive: Storytelling for Christian Education Teachers

Information for session leader:

Audience: Christian Education Teachers of Children and Youth

Time: 45 minutes

Objectives: Participants will:

- A) Review three steps to preparing to tell a story:
 - i. Study the story
 - ii. Connect to God's Word
 - iii. Connect to your students.
- B) Experience storytelling techniques for various age groups.
- C) Share resources and become familiar with the storytelling resources their congregation has available.

Notes to the Leader: This session can be led entirely by you or as a cooperative effort with other teachers. The "Presentation" is a skit and will require you to work with one other person. To prepare for the "Activity", read through all of the story ideas and select the ones that will meet the needs of your participants.

Space requirements: If you choose "Activity Option 1", you'll need enough room(s) to split into groups and allow each group to hear and concentrate.

A circle of chairs is preferable. A table or two is needed in one corner for the Browsing Corner.

Supplies:

Browsing Corner: table, any supplies your church has available to enable storytelling such as: puppets, flannel graphs, Bible storybooks, story pictures, props, costumes, videos.

Presentation: A helper to act out the skit for you (named ELAINE here) chair and small table, Bible, curriculum guide, Bible atlas, commentary, Bible dictionary, signs reading: "Step 1: Know Your Story" "Step 2: Connect to God's Word" "Step 3: Connect with the Students" ,pens for writing on the chart paper, a bathrobe and slippers for actor, chart paper with a simple plan for the dramatization written on it (Appendix I)

Activity: Items for the story techniques you choose to present.

Advance Preparation:

One month or more in advance:

- ❖ Contact potential story tellers and assign roles to them. Provide them with copies of this workshop. You need someone to do the skit with you, a person for each age group you need represented, who will choose two story ideas to present (age 3-5, age 6-8, age 9-12, youth and adult) .
- ❖ Contact potential actors for the "Presentation."
- ❖ Invite participants and invite them to bring story ideas that have worked for them for the browsing table.

Three weeks in advance:

- ❖ Leader and/or helpers prepare the stories they will tell for the "Activity." Encourage each storyteller to get to know their stories, connect with God's Word and select the story telling techniques they will present.
- ❖ Touch base with your storytellers. Ask how they are doing and offer practical support.
- ❖ Search through your church for storytelling resources. Check out storage rooms and cupboards, the church library for story books, resource books and videos, ask your pastor(s) to check their personal libraries for resource books, even furnace rooms sometimes house old props or costumes.

Two weeks in advance:

- ❖ Storytellers assemble the materials needed to tell each story.
- ❖ Touch base with your storytellers. Ask how they are doing and offer practical support.
- ❖ Copy and assemble handouts.
- ❖ Make signs. **"Step 1: Know Your Story", "Step 2: Connect to God's Word", "Step 3: Connect with the Students"**

One week in advance:

- ❖ Have a skit practice and assemble items needed for the skit.
- ❖ Story tellers practice telling the stories until they are totally comfortable.
- ❖ Touch base with your storytellers once more.
- ❖ Prepare a small thank you card or gift for each helper.
- ❖ Will you need nametags? Refreshments? If so, prepare them. Prepare chart papers.

Day of:

- ❖ Set up the room(s) you will be using. Display agenda.
- ❖ Set up the browsing corner with the storytelling resources you have in your congregation. Leave space for items participants have been invited to bring.
- ❖ Remember to bring the thank you items, handouts and nametags you have prepared and plan when and how to give these out.

INTRODUCTION (5 min)

Introduce yourself and anyone working with you.

Leader's comments: Bringing God's Word to children through telling the stories of the Bible is central to Christian Education. From today's session you'll take home some practical suggestions for preparing and delivering a Bible story that will impact your life and the lives of your students.

Display agenda:

1. Introduction (5 min)
2. Presentation (10 min) Steps to planning an engaging story time.
3. Activity (20 min) Participate in some story telling techniques proven to work for the age group you teach.
4. Debrief (10 min) Become familiar with the resources available to you. Browse ideas your fellow teachers have brought to share.

Icebreaker: Model this activity by taking the first turn after giving directions. Have each person share their name and a Bible story they enjoy and the picture they see in their mind's eye when they think of it. If the group is larger than 8-10 people, split into groups of four or five for this activity. An even faster way is to do it in pairs.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, Thank you for your example as a master storyteller and for each person here today. Your word is a living word and we have all been changed by you through it. Work in us as we seek to improve our story telling skills. We want your word to come alive and transform the lives of our students through your love and grace. Bless our learning. Amen

PRESENTATION (10 MINS)

Steps to Planning an Engaging Storytime

Leader: Let's go through the steps for developing any story idea. Elaine my lovely assistant will demonstrate.

Setup: Have a small table at center stage with Bible atlas, commentary and Bible dictionary stacked on the table.

Step 1: Know your story (display "Step 1" sign)

Elaine enters with house coat, coffee cup, nightcap, and settles herself in a chair or at a table with her Bible and curriculum guide.

Leader: It all started one quiet evening. Actually Saturday evening at 11:00, exactly 12 hours before Sunday school class! We won't criticize her, she's had a busy week and it just kind of snuck up on her (*Elaine yawns, scratches etc. and opens her Bible*).

Of course it's more fun to plan a story when you're not pressured for time. One idea is to read your Bible story for the next Sunday, this Sunday, and then you can think about it all week. But the reality of Sunday school preparation is that we often have something left to prepare Saturday evening or even Sunday morning.

Elaine wasn't familiar with the Bible story. To get to know it better she did three things:

- A. She studied the story by reading it over a few times, reading the sections just before and just after the story, imagining the story from the point of view of each character (Elaine mimes this). She read the story out loud to herself (*Elaine reads Matthew 3:13-17 aloud*).
- B. She read the background information on the story in her Curriculum Guide (*Elaine opens the curriculum guide and mimes reading it*).
- C. She looked for resources. She wanted to make sure all of her questions about the story were answered and to anticipate the questions her kids might ask. She wanted to be ready to answer them (*Elaine mimes looking through the Bible dictionary, atlas, and commentary and having AHA! experiences*).

Step 2: Connect with God's Word (display "Step 2" sign)

Leader: Elaine wanted to be open to the Spirit's leading in her life and the lives of her students. So she meditated on the story in prayer (*Elaine kneels and mimes praying*) and listened for what God was saying to her through that portion of scripture at this juncture of her life. From this reflective time she brought forth a theme that she planned to communicate to the children through the story and lesson (*Elaine stands and says: When we are baptized, God says to us, "You are my own dear child"*).

Next she picked out some key phrases, modernized or simplified them, and memorized them (*Elaine: Clears throat: "I ought to be baptized by you. Why have you come to me?" Scratches head, "Me baptize you? No way, Jesus!" nods head*).

Step 3: Connect to the students (display "Step 3" sign)

Leader: She chose an introductory question or activity that would connect the story to the student's lives.

Elaine: *How can they relate to Baptism? I know! I'll ask them about their baptisms or baptisms they've seen...Let's see... "What happens at baptisms? Who or what did people see at your baptism?"*

Leader: Finally, she chose a story technique and practiced and practiced (*Elaine mimes practicing*). All ready, and hey, it's only midnight! There's still time to prepare a craft!!

By studying the story, connecting with the story through prayer, and then building a connection with your students' lives through an introductory activity, you'll communicate a lasting impression with your students.

ACTIVITY (20 MINUTES)

Leader: You may find that your curriculum guide suggests the perfect story telling technique for your class. Other times you know it will fall flat because it does not address the learning styles of your students. What do you do then? This booklet of 11 storytelling techniques is for you to take home. Today, you'll personally experience a few of the techniques that work for the age group you teach. (Describe the option you've chosen below).

Options for this section:

1. Split into age groups (Age 3-5, Grades 1-3, Grades 4-6, Youth) Have a pre-arranged volunteer demonstrate two or three (timing dependent) story ideas for this age group by preparing ahead and telling a story to the participants as if they were students.
2. As leader, you choose three story ideas and develop them for telling to the group as if the participants were students. Be sure to communicate the theme and connecting activity/question first.

DEBRIEF (10 MINUTES)

Hand out the techniques booklet and the other handouts. Allow for a ten minute period for browsing the table, discussion and examining the story ideas.

CLOSING BLESSING:

"As you go out to teach, may God bless you with joy in your students, a sense of Christ's presence in the classroom, excitement in the ministry we share and gratefulness for the gospel story which frees us all. Amen."

HANDOUTS

Steps to Planning an Engaging Story Time

Step 1: Know the story

- ✓ Read the story, read it in context, imagine the perspectives of various characters, read it out loud.
- ✓ Read the background information on the story from the curriculum guide.
- ✓ If necessary consult other resources such as a Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas or a commentary.

Step 2: Connect with the story

- ✓ Meditate on the story in prayer. What message does God bring you through the story?
- ✓ Develop a theme you wish to share with your students. OR find a personal connection with the theme suggested by your curriculum guide.
- ✓ Select key phrases from the story and simplify, modernize and memorize them.

Step 3: Connect to your students

- ✓ Choose a story telling technique that will match the learning styles of your students.
- ✓ Prepare a written plan or outline.
- ✓ Choose an introductory question or activity to connect the story to the student's lives.

Storytelling Techniques

You will find that some of the storytelling techniques that follow will appeal to you and others won't. Please use what you feel comfortable with. We have simply offered as many techniques as possible. Have fun with them!

SURPRISE BAG

Age 3 – Age 8

Preparation: Choose everyday objects that illustrate various parts of the story and collect them into a bag or pillowcase.

Description: As you tell the story remove the items and use them to illustrate.

Example: Genesis 37: 3-4, 12-35. (Joseph and his Brothers)

Supplies: Bible, colorful shirt, plain shirt, ketchup, blue garbage bag, pail, stuffed lamb, bag of money.

As you tell about Joseph's brothers put on the plain coat and hold the lamb. Then tell about the colorful coat and put on the colorful shirt and admire it. When the brothers grab Joseph and tear off his coat, tear off the shirt and throw it on the ground. The blue garbage bag can be the water at the bottom of the well. When the brothers soak the coat in blood, squirt ketchup on the shirt (put it on the garbage bag at this point).

VISUAL TELLING

Age 3 – Age 8

Preparation: Gather or create visual aides to use to illustrate the story such as: a flannel graph, paper figures to stand alone or to be stuck on a wall or bulletin board, pictures.

Practice telling the story using the visual aides you've selected.

Variation: Have the students hold the various visual aides and put them up when their turn in the story comes.

Description: Tell the story using visual aides to illustrate it.

Example: Luke 2:1-20 The Christmas Story

Supplies: A manger scene with separate figures.

As you tell the Christmas Story have the children place the various figures on the table as they are mentioned and move them closer to the stable etc. until the whole scene is set up.

PUPPET TELLING

Age 3 – Age 8

CAUTION! DO NOT USE PUPPET THEATRES

Young children rely on facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures to help them understand what is being said. At this age puppets are best used on your lap right out in the open. You can speak for the puppet or have it whisper things in your ear as you carry on a conversation. The children will be mesmerized by the puppet and won't even notice that you are speaking for it.

Example: John 8:1-11 The Woman Caught in Adultery

Supplies: A dog puppet, a cake pan in a bag, and some crumbs from Rice Krispie cake on the puppet's face and the pan.

Start by having a regular conversation with the dog not noticing his face. Then notice it. Say: "Barkley what have you been eating?"

Barkley: "What? Nothing!"

You: "Nothing? You've got it all over your fur!" Take a bit of it off and then say, "It's Rice Krispie cake. Barkley did you eat the cake I made for the kids today? Open the bag and get out the empty cake pan with a few Rice Krispie crumbs in it. "It's all gone."

Barkley whimpers: "All right I did eat it. It smelled and tasted so good I couldn't help myself!"

You: Barkley I'm so angry with you! I made this cake for all of the kids to eat. Now they are probably mad at you too! Kids are you mad? Let them answer.

Barkley: Whine lots in between parts. "Kids, (your name), I'm really sorry for eating your cake. I feel bad about it now. Please forgive me."

You: "Well I guess sometimes I make mistakes too. What about you kids? Shall we forgive Barkley?"

"Okay Barkley we forgive you!"

You: Let's hear a Bible story about a woman who did something wrong, like Barkley. Let's see if Jesus forgives her.

CHOREOGRAPHED STORY

Age 3 to Age 8

Preparation: Choose the key phrases you wish to have the children repeat. Plan and practice how you will tell this story to your class.

Description: Have the class stand in a circle and lead them in imitating your actions as you tell the story in action form. Use body movement and tone/rhythm changes in your voice to keep their interest. Involve your students in the body movement and in repetition of key phrases.

Example: Luke 15:4-6

A shepherd once had a hundred sheep. Let's count 'em!

(Put both hands in front of your chest, palms out, fingers splayed) 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100!! But one day he counted them and (repeat actions)

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, WAIT! Only 99 were there. So he left the 99 sheep and ran (run on the spot).

He searched high (Shade sun from eyes and stand on tip toes)

And low (crouch down)

And everywhere! (Look from side to side)

Until at last he found the sheep. Hurrah! (Jump up and put hands in the air)

Then he put the sheep on his shoulders (mime putting sheep on shoulders)

And carried it all the way home. (march in place)

When he got home he called all of his friends. (mime telephoning)

and said, "Come celebrate! I've found my lost sheep!"

Hurrah! (Jump up and put hands in the air.)

COLLAGE STORY

Age 3 – Age 12

Preparation: Have a poster board, glue or tape ready. You may write a title on the poster board. Collect pictures to illustrate the parts of the story you wish to highlight. Look through magazines or on the internet for pictures.

Description: Give each student one or more pictures. You can hand them out specifically or let them draw them from a bag randomly. The students lay their pictures in front of them. With younger children you may spend time talking about each picture before the story begins. As you tell the story the children raise their hands when their picture is mentioned and then come up and glue it on the poster board before you continue with the story.

Variation: Read the story together from the Bible and have the students find and cut out pictures to make the collage together or individually.

Example: Genesis 1 (Creation)

Supplies: Cut out pictures of darkness and light, sun, moon, stars, water, land, trees grasses etc., glue and a poster board.

Pass out or let each child choose a number of pictures. Label a poster board with the title "And God said, It is good." and display the poster on a wall in the story area. Be ready with glue. As you tell the story of creation have the students come up and glue their respective pictures on the poster. Then continue. At the end, review what God made by repeating the names of everything on the poster and end by reading the title once more.

DRAMATIZATION

Age 3 to Age 12

Preparation: From the Bible passage choose the action, characters, and key phrases you wish to use. Plan out the sequence. Know your part as narrator – keep it simple. Gather simple costumes and props.

Description: Give out the parts by handing the children their costumes and briefly describing their role. (i.e. You're Jesus. Put on this shirt and stand here). Then you, the teacher, will be the narrator or prompter to keep the story flowing. Feel free to act out many times with the children changing roles.

Variation: With older children, read through the story together from the Bible before acting it out. A student can be given the role of narrator as well, with support.

Example: Mark 11:1-10

Supplies: John's outfit, Jesus' outfit (outfit could be something as simple as a necktie or hat), bowl of water, dove on string tied to yardstick, blue tarp or blanket, beach towels.

As you describe the setting and John the Baptist, have the students help make the set. The blue tarp or blanket with the bowl of water on it is the river, and the towels are the river banks. John and Jesus put on their simple costumes and the student holding the dove may need to stand on a chair. The remaining students form the crowd. Describe John's baptism and have some (or all depending on your student's enthusiasm) of the crowd come forward for John to put a little water on their foreheads. Then have Jesus come forward and have John and Jesus repeat the conversation given in scripture. You may simplify the words for younger children. John baptizes Jesus and the dove comes gently down on Jesus head. Have the whole crowd join in being God's voice saying, "You are my own dear son..."

CLOTHESLINE STORY

Age 6 – Age 9

Preparation: Choose the scenes you will include in your telling.

Hang a clothesline in your classroom and choose the props you will hang on it to illustrate the story. Make faces if desired. Plan how you will hang items move them or remove them to illustrate the story.

Description: As you tell the story hang items or story figures from the clothesline to illustrate the story.

Example: John 8:1-11 The Woman Caught in Adultery

Supplies: Three men's shirts with ties on hangers, one women's dress on a hanger, one outfit to represent Jesus on a hanger. Clothesline set up in classroom. Three "rocks" made of masking tape.

Hang the men's shirts and the dress on the line and describe the situation. Hang Jesus on the line. Describe the men's accusations and their question to Jesus. Throw the dress to the ground and put the masking tape rocks on the sleeves of the men's shirts. Describe Jesus response and as each man realizes his own sins remove him from the line. When all three men are removed, describe Jesus conversation with the woman and hang the woman once again next to Jesus.

SING A STORY / CHORAL TELLING

Age 9 – Age 12

Preparation: Read the Bible passage.

Choose key phrases and modernize them if desired. Choose a theme phrase for a chorus.

Write down and make copies for students of a choral reading using the phrases you've chosen. Rap is a possibility.

Set it to music if desired.

Variations: Alternate choral reading and singing. Add actions. Add a verse or two to include details of your personal story. Invite the students to create their own verses about their lives.

Example: Matthew 13:44-50

Verse 1:

A person goes into a field and finds treasure
He know it holds value without measure
So he goes and sells everything he owns
Just to buy that field for his own, his own

Chorus:

The kingdom of heaven of heaven is like this
There is only one thing that'll bring you happiness
God treasures you and he wants you for his own
He's given everything so to him you will belong

Verse 2:

A shop owner searches all over for fine pearls
He finds one he wants more than any in the world
He goes and sells everything he owns, he owns
Just to have that pearl for his own his own

Verse 3:

Some fishermen sort out the fish that they get
Some they throw away and some they keep in the net
The good ones are food and the bad ones they burn
What will it be when it is your turn?

DRAW A STORY

Age 9 – Age 12

Preparation: Ensure you have the use of a whiteboard or chart paper and the appropriate drawing utensils.

Plan out and practice drawings to accompany your telling of the story.

Description: As you tell the story you draw simple structures and figures that illustrate the story for the children.

Variation: Call on individual students to draw parts of the drawing.

Example: Matthew 7:24-27 The foolish builder and the wise builder.

As you tell the story draw the houses and their locations, the storm and the results.

TAPING OR VIDEO TAPING A STORY

Youth

Preparation: Gather tape recorders or video recorders. Plan out how you will organize the students and the purpose of the production (i.e. sharing with others, enjoying just for yourselves)

Description: The students perform and tape a news production of a Bible story.

Variation: Assign students to groups and have each group make a production about a different Bible story or part of the same story for presentation to the class.

Example: Luke 2:1-20 (The Birth of Jesus)

The "Bethlehem News" has just heard about Jesus birth. As a class create a news program about the event. Involve everyone as reporters, interviewers, interviewees, sound effects and the newscasters. Questions to include: What did you see? Who was there? What meaning do you think this has? How do you feel about this?

TELLING YOUR LIFE STORY

Youth to Adult

Preparation: Copy journey timeline worksheets for each participant. Complete your own and reflect on it.

Description: Each person receives a Journey Timeline worksheet. Either provide quiet class time to complete them or assign this for homework. Provide sharing time where individuals can share their reflections.

Journey Timeline

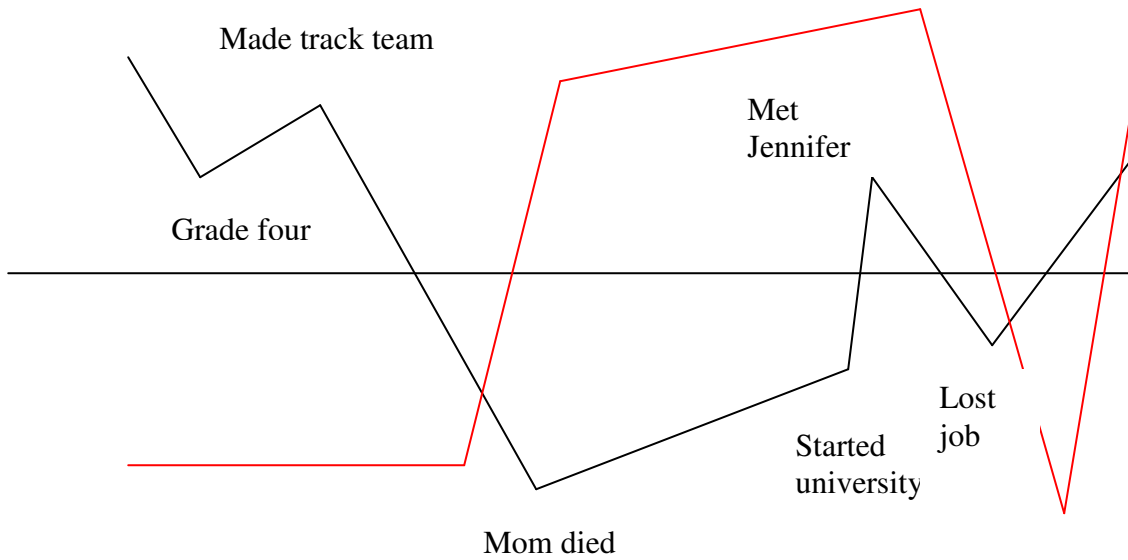
Think back over your life. Plot the high and low times in your life on the graph with high times set above the line, low times below the line, and in between times on the line. Then, using a different color pen, graph the times you felt closest to God or felt your relationship with God was growing on the same graph.

Reflect on these times in your life and God's activity in your life.

In the following example, the blue line is a straight line representing the timeline of your life. The green line is a record of the highs and lows of your life. Positive times reach above the line, negative times reach below. The red line is a record of your

relationship with God. Times in which you felt close to God or that your relationship with God was growing are marked above the line. Time in which you felt abandoned or far from God or that your relationship with God was weak are marked below the line.

Example:



Plan for Dramatization

1. Introductory Question: Have you ever seen a baptism? What people or things did you see there?
2. Build the set as kids answer (eg. At Jesus baptism there was water too. It was a river).
3. The crowd comes to be baptised (Baptism of repentance).
4. Jesus comes to be baptised.
 - Me baptise you, Jesus? No way!
 - God wants it this way for now.
 - Okay then.
5. The dove.
6. God's voice. (ALL) You are my own dear son, and I love you.
7. At our baptisms, God says to us: You are my own dear child.