



Four Creative Ways to Teach the Bible

By Aaron Reynolds
adapted from “Four Ways to Teach the Bible Creatively”
Promiseland Conference Workshop

Teaching the Word of God should not be boring, least of all to children. And while fun presentations captivate children, you want your teaching to be more than entertainment. Ultimately, effective teachers want their students to be in awe of the Bible, inspired by it, emotionally moved by it, and then equipped by it to effect true life change. How do you make Bible lessons engaging and transformational? With a full belt of fun, creative teaching and application tools, even a solo teacher can bring life—and life change—into Bible lessons

Goal:

To equip large group communicators with practical, creative methods for teaching the Bible, regardless of a ministry's budget, space, or volunteer ranks.



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How to Use “Four Creative Ways to Teach the Bible”

Welcome to BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY. You've purchased a resource that draws from the experience of children's ministry leaders at Willow Creek Community Church. Through these materials, your ministry team will gain insight and practical tips gleaned from years of innovation and experience in children's ministry.

BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY works when you want, where you want, and the way you want. Whether you want to inform your ministry's leadership or train your volunteers, BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY materials are completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings or training huddles with your children's ministry team. BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHILDREN'S MINISTRY at the beginning of such a meeting:

1. **Select a handout.** Suppose, for example, you are seeking a way to get more young people engaged and participating in your Bible lessons. Select “Audience Participation 101.” Or suppose you're looking to expand your repertoire of creative teaching tools. Select “The Art Attack.”
2. **Print and photocopy the handout.** Let's say you selected “Audience Participation 101.” Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do *not* need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from Building Children's Ministry (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).
3. **Prepare for discussion.** We recommend you read the material and any relevant Scripture passages listed on the material.
4. **Lead the discussion.** Most handouts can be read within five minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions, or move your team through the following questions:
 - “Why are these principles important for successful ministry?”
 - “How well does our ministry currently incorporate these principles?”
 - “What one or two practical things could we do in the next year to improve in this area?”

Pray

Pray that God would use these ideas to spark engaging, creative, and transformational approaches to teaching his Word.



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Audience Participation 101

Engage all the children in the lesson by putting a few children on stage.

Galatians 6:6

Creativity captivates children. But too often we expend our creativity on non-teaching elements. When the teacher pulls out the Bible, the children are cued to be bored in comparison. Instead, pour your creativity into the Bible lesson. Train kids to recognize that when the teacher steps to the front, NOW is the time to be interested and excited. One of the best ways to make teaching captivating is through planned audience participation. Here are five steps to engaging children in the Bible lesson:

The Invitation, or Set-up

When you stand to teach a story or lesson, invite the children into an exciting time of discovery. For example: “I am so excited that you are here, because today you are going to hear an unbelievable story. It is a story of mighty wars and victorious warriors. It is a story of incredible victories and horrible, bloody defeats. It is a story of power and of courage and of trust in God.”

Recruit On-stage Volunteers from the Audience

Children are quick to volunteer. Plan how you can use several on stage, giving them corresponding words—or especially actions—to perform during the lesson. For example: “Our story is about two armies. You three will be the Philistines, a mighty but cocky army. Every time you hear me say, ‘Philistines,’ I want you to wave your spears in the air and sing, ‘We are the champions, my friend.’ Now, you three will be the Israelite army...”

Involve the Whole Audience

Throughout the lesson, ask questions to which the answer is obvious and invite the rest of the children to shout the answer. Invite them to cheer when appropriate; even give them lines. Allow them to live vicariously through the characters on stage, and thus, through the lives of the biblical characters your on-stage participants represent.

Tell the Story with Cues and Responses

You don’t need a drama team, lights, or fancy props. Three kids raising their fists can hold imaginary spears, while mighty Goliath can be a kid with an evil laugh. Tell the story with passion and action. Work out your story—even with memorized script—beforehand, looking for opportunities to include the children as you tell it.

Apply the Lesson Immediately

Don’t wait for the children to sit down; don’t move them to small groups yet. If the story was about the courage of David, then use the moment you created—the moment when the children are empathizing with the biblical narrative—to apply your theme of courage to likely situations in their lives. Make your theme relevant right now. Give them something to take back with them, so that the emotions and convictions of the moment can be translated to Monday morning events. That’s how true life change happens.

Discuss

- What areas of our children’s ministry are we putting the most creativity into? The least?
- How does audience participation facilitate engagement and life change?
- Discuss how you could tell another common biblical story with audience participation.

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Advanced Audience Participation

Make the whole assembly a stage, where every child is involved in the story.

2 John 12

While the previous handout utilized a few children on stage, an alternative technique utilizes all the children as actors, props, and sound effects in an unfolding drama that requires no training, expense, or technology.

The Invitation, or Set-up

Open the lesson with a high-energy invitation for the children to help you tell the story. In the set-up, include easily understood descriptions of scene, so that the children can begin to imagine themselves set in the story itself. For example: “I am so glad you’re here today, because you’re going to be so glad you didn’t miss church this weekend. There is a story that I have for you that is going to change how you go through your life next week. It is a story that takes place on a beautiful, sunny day in the summer, alongside a beautiful lake. It’s a story about something that happened to Jesus. And it’s a story that I need your help to tell.”

Use Cue-and-Response

Since you want the whole audience involved, throw out easy questions during the set-up and story that the children can answer. Let them shout the answers in return. For example: “These twelve dudes that Jesus hung out with all the time, there were twelve of them, his best friends in the world: what were they called? Who knows? Yeah. Shout it out. Disciples, right!”

Cue Interactive Motions and Noises Through Mimicry

The children participate by becoming the props, actors, and sound effects in the drama. Give them actions or sounds that they can mimic after you. You can even divide the children into groups. For example, in the story of Jesus calming the storm, select a group of children to be the disciples rowing (they imitate rowing), while the surrounding children make breeze (“whoop”) and rain (“plop-plop”) noises. As the storm gains intensity (the breeze children wave their arms; the rain children add thunder), the rowing disciple actors cry, “Jesus, help us!” If it becomes a challenge to keep the children focused amid the activity, interrupt the action every few seconds to ask a question they all respond to, then return to the next scene of the story. The children will pick up on the cue that they only “make noise” for a few seconds before the scene shifts with new instructions (the storm story also has the added benefit of ending with “Peace, be still!”).

Application

Make the application immediately, comparing the actions of the children to events that actually happen to us and comparing the actors in the story to the children themselves. Don’t wait for the magic of the moment to dissipate. Help the children see how the Bible lesson could easily play out in their life this next week.

Discuss

- What can we learn from how Jesus used audience participation in his teaching ministry?
- Discuss how you could tell another common biblical story with audience participation. Map out the actions and applications that you could actually use in that lesson.

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The Art Attack

Engage the visual learners with something more powerful than flannelgraph.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7

Many teaching tools for children target the auditory and kinesthetic learners: singing, hand motions, audience participation, and drama, to name a few. Your visual children will engage as well if you mix into your teaching toolbox an exciting, engaging visual presentation like “The Art Attack.”

The Invitation, or Set-up

Build excitement from the beginning through enthusiasm and the surprise of an Art Attack. For example: “I’m so glad you are here today, because you are going to experience an unbelievable story that...Whoa! Did you feel that? I think we’re about to have an art attack! Art attack is when we use art to tell stories out of the Bible, and today we are going to art attack all over an amazing story about two spies...”

Prop Prep

Before Sunday morning, think ahead to what art supplies or props might make a story come alive. What would set the scene? For the story of the spies mentioned above, deserts, cacti, spies, grapes, milk, and honey are just a few of the things that may inspire ideas. You can draw these things on a large board, or you can use the whole stage as your canvas. Want sand? Dump a wheelbarrow full into a box and bring in some potted cacti!

Ask Questions That Engage the Children

As you create, ask the children questions that make them feel like they’re part of the creative process. For example, “What kinds of plants grow in the desert? Do water lilies grow in the desert? What grows there? Cactus! (Add it to your art when they answer.) Where did desert dwellers live? In apartment buildings? (No!) In mud houses? (No!) In skyscrapers? (No! In tents!) Oh! In tents? (Yes!) Then we’ll add some tents...”

Have Fun with the Art

Feel free to laugh at your own artistic inability. You don’t have to be renowned chalk artist to do this well. In fact, the children can probably relate to stick figures better, anyway. So laugh. Make sound effects. Demonstrate that you’re having fun with the art.

Application

As your art project wraps up, make the application to the children’s lives. Draw the Scripture right into the canvas, then show how that Scripture would actually help at home, school, or play. Reinforce the visual lesson by asking the children to repeat the verse, for example, “When the bullies all throw the dodgeball at the small kid, what do you do? ‘Be strong and courageous, for the Lord, your God, is with you!’ When others say mean things to you, what do you do?”

Discuss

- How does creativity through artwork engage children?
- What ways could you use your teaching space for art?
- Choose a Bible lesson and come up with ways to make it an Art Attack.

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The Game Show

Engage children through television's popular audience participation technique.

1 Kings 10:1–3

The game show tool takes more preparation, but is popular with the children and particularly effective at reviewing information. You may even use a game show following a lesson and application, to actually exercise the children in applying biblical concepts. There are many different varieties and ways to do the game show, so you may consider watching children's networks (such as Nickelodeon or Disney) to find new ideas.

Prep the Contestants

If you utilize other volunteers or older students, you can create a scripted game show that stays focused more on the lesson and less on the game. The children may cheer for the contestants, or even be a part of the game, but scripting the contestants allows you to reinforce concepts beyond merely trivia answers. An example of this in a moment...

The Invitation, or Set-up

Play act as the game show host and use the cliché phrases that television hosts use to promote the game. As you welcome the audience, explain the rules and clarify how the children will participate. For example: "Welcome to God's Hall of Fame Game. I'll be your host, Aaron, and here's how we play: You're going to see in a moment three, count them, three special guests sitting in these three chairs. Note that each of them is wearing a nametag with the same name. But two of them are imposters. Only one is the real special guest. It will up to you, based on what you know about the story and what you find out through the game, to figure out who is the real special guest and who are the imposters."

Creating Teams

Though it's usually best to create a game where every child "wins," dividing the children into teams enables you to both draw on the excitement of competition and practice team unity. Encourage the children to cheer for and encourage one another. Give each team (and you can have volunteers assigned to each team) opportunity to participate.

How to Teach Through the Game

With humor, game play, and a little competition, you can engage the children. But how do you teach? In the example game above, ask each of three "Davids" questions about his life (For example: "Why did you use a sling instead of a sword when fighting Goliath?"). Two contestants give humorous, wrong answers ("My sword was at the dry cleaners"), while the third gives an instructive, correct answer ("I used a weapon I was familiar with, and I trusted God for the results"). By the end of the game, the real David is apparent, the children have heard the story of a man who trusted God with his whole heart, and each team gets a chance to guess (correctly) the real David. Everybody wins!

Discuss

- How could you use a game show to review information?
- How could you use it to teach?
- Brainstorm on game shows that could be customized into teaching lessons. Choose one and plan how could you use the game for children's ministry.

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Building Children's Ministry: Children's ministry training resources from Christianity Today International and Willow Creek Association

📄 www.BuildingChildrensMinistry.com

Promiseland: Children's ministry curriculum from Willow Creek Association

📄 www.PromiselandOnline.com

Building Church Leaders: Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International

📄 www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com

The Children's Worker's Encyclopedia of Bible Teaching Ideas: New Testament *Jody Broolsma, Jan Kersbner, Lois Keffer, and Susan Lingo, eds.* A collection of ideas—devotions, games, skits, crafts, and more—on several stories from the New Testament. Available in Old Testament as well. (Group, 1997; ISBN 1559456256)

The Encyclopedia of Bible Games for Children's Ministry *Group Publishers.* 175 games, divided into 8 different categories, designed to be used with materials readily available in your church. (Group, 2004; ISBN 0764426966)

The Humongous Book of Games for Children's Ministry *Group Publishers.* An indexed collection of 220 games designed to be both fun and instructive. (Group, 2001; ISBN 076442355X)

Making Your Children's Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kid's Week *by Sue Miller and David Staal.* A step-by-step guide to children's ministry based on Willow Creek Community Church's Promiseland children's ministry. (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 031025485X)

On Stage! Theater Games and Activities for Kids *by Lisa Bany-Winters.* A collection of games for introductory drama training. (Sagebrush, 1997; ISBN 0613879597)

24 Tandem Bible Hero Story Scripts for Children's Ministry *by Steven James.* One of a series of books filled with scripts for telling Bible stories in humorous creative ways using two actors, puppets, or even one of each. (Standard, 2004; ISBN 0784713219)

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