

Learning activities are creative activities designed to reinforce Scriptural truths. These hands-on activities may involve art, music, writing, drama or other skills. But each activity will help children apply Scriptural truths to their lives. What qualifies an activity for use at Sunday School? How can we be certain that the activity will result in learning Holy Scripture? When does an activity become a learning activity?

The activity must fit one of these criteria in order to be used as a learning activity:

Question 1: Does it teach, review or reinforce a Scriptural truth?

Question 2: Does the learning activity encourage use of Holy Scripture and Scriptural oriented tools such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, maps, etc.?

Question 3: Will the activity give the child an opportunity to relate the Scriptural truth to his or her everyday experiences?

As the relevance of Scriptural truth becomes apparent to the child, the teacher then needs to help the child plan for specific ways to make the Scriptural truth a part of his or her day-to-day actions. The teacher also needs to follow up, in order to be aware of what happened when the child attempted to put the Scriptural truth into practice. This kind of follow-up provides a basis for teacher-child evaluation. It also permits the teacher to be supportive and encouraging as the child moves toward changing his or her behavior, a true test of learning.

Be Specific, Yet Flexible

Each learning activity must be specific enough to permit the child to feel assured (as the activity develops) that the activity has purpose. However, it must be flexible enough to take into account the ability and skill level of each child.

For example, as a teacher prepares for a learning activity in which puppets will be used to dramatize a Scripture story, that teacher will make sure the activity includes both academic and nonacademic-oriented tasks (writing and reading the scripts as well as making and using the puppets). A teacher also will offer children opportunities to participate in planning. Often a child's ideas help make the activity more effective than if only the plans of the teacher were used. Then the teacher is not only a learning guide, but also a learner along with the children.

How to Guide Activities

Five main steps are needed for learning to take place in an activity:

1. Introduce the purpose of each activity.

When an activity is first presented to children, it is important to explain why the children will be doing it, and not simply what they will do. For example, children may choose an art activity because they like to draw cartoons. Help them see beyond the procedures to the purpose: e.g., "to help us learn ways to trust God in hard times."

2. Involve children in research.

While research may occasionally be an activity all by itself, all other types of activities need to begin with having the children review or gather some specific Scripture information. The method for this research must be compatible with children's ability and interests. For example, a six-year old may simply read Scripture words the teacher has lettered on a chalkboard, while an eleven-year old will locate and read the verses in the Holy Scripture. The older child might use a Scripture dictionary to look up any word he does not understand, while the younger child may look at pictures or listen to a spoken explanation.

3. Guide the conversation to emphasize the purpose of the activity.

As children work on an activity, the teacher uses informal conversation to guide a child's thoughts, feelings and words toward the lesson focus. For example, as a role-play activity begins to lose focus, the teacher might ask one of the players, "What would Michael say to his mother to show he really wanted to do what was right, like our Scripture verse says?" Quickly the participants will refocus on the point of the activity.

By being alert to relate the child's experience to what God's Word says, a teacher helps that child understand Scriptural truth.

4. Lead children to identify what they are learning by doing the activity.

As children near the completion of an activity, the teacher should ask them to put into words what they have learned about the main truth of the lesson: "What have you learned about forgiveness today?" "What information did you discover about Paul and his missionary journeys today?" When children find such a question difficult to answer, the teacher knows that more learning is needed.

5. Lead children in sharing with others what they learned.

One of the most important steps in the learning process is sharing with someone else what was learned. Children need to be encouraged to do this on a regular basis:

- Asking the child to think of what to tell someone else about an activity is a helpful way to lead the child to think of the point of a lesson. "If you were to tell a friend about this activity, how would you explain what you've learned about Jesus and the children?"
- Give children an opportunity to share their Scripture learning activities with those in other groups. This sharing of activities can be done in a variety of ways. Children can show what they did while the teacher explains it. The teacher can ask questions to lead children in explaining what they learned. A few children can speak on behalf of the rest of their group.
- Each group member can offer one or two sentences to tell the most important (or interesting) thing they learned.
- Occasionally you may arrange for a group of children to display and explain their activity to children in a different age-level.

Art Activities

Learning activities involving creative art experiences provide an enjoyable and effective way for children to express what they have learned and to plan ways to put that learning into action. As you use art activities, remember that the learning *process* is more important than the end *product*. As you select and use art experiences, focus the child's attention on the Scriptural truth concerned, not on the result or quality of the work.

For example:

- as a child works to portray an incident in the Scripture story, the teacher should ask questions to stimulate the child to rethink the narrative: "What happened just before the scene you are making?"

"Which person in this scene is a good example to follow? Why?"

The teacher should also ask questions to help the child focus on the main truth illustrated in the story:

"What did you learn about friendship from the story of David?"

"What could you do this week that would show kindness as David did?"

- as a child draws or paints or models a contemporary scene, the teacher should connect this familiar experience to the Scripture story or Scripture verse:

"What are you doing in this picture that is the same as what Ruth did in our story?"

"How would it help the person in your picture if he/she remembered our Scripture verse?"

Benefits of Art Activities

Lesson-related art activities can help a child:

- show in a concrete way an abstract concept such as loving, forgiving, worshiping, serving;
- think in terms of specific actions (wash the dishes, help my parents) as he/she applies a Scripture verse such as "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1);
- discover/show me (for example, illustrating in proper sequence the events of a Scripture story);
 - put into practice Scripture truths (for example, showing love to others by making small gifts for patients in a hospital);
 - express thoughts that may be difficult to put into words (such as illustrating a scene from a Scripture story).

Tips for Leading Art Activities

- Before children begin using the art materials, ask each one to tell his or her idea for a picture, scene, etc.
- If an activity requires use of a material which is new to you, or if the activity involves several steps, make a sample before class.
- Materials for art activities are limited only by your imagination. Enlist the help of interested parents and church members in collecting supplies.

- Store materials and equipment in an organized way where children can see and reach them. Label containers and shelves so children can easily return items to their proper places.
- You may want to cover tables with newspapers in order to make cleanup easy.
- Keep paper towels or sponges handy so that cleanup will be easy when a spill occurs.

Creative Writing Activities

Creative writing can provide valuable learning experiences for children when the experiences are planned according to the abilities of the child and when they hold no threat of failure. Committing thoughts to paper—as a poem, a story, a journal, etc.—aids a child in recalling and then developing the key thoughts expressed.

For example:

- A beginning reader may dictate words or sentences for the teacher to write, enabling the child to have a visible reminder of ideas expressed in class.
- A child who writes a letter to a friend explaining the main point of the lesson is developing skill in sharing the faith with others.
- A child who rewrites a Scripture verse in his or her own words is grappling with meaning, not just rote memory.
- A child who contributes a word or phrase to a group composition is encouraged to feel a part of the class and enjoys the success of having his or her ideas accepted.

Benefits of Creative Writing Activities

Lesson-related creative writing activities can help children:

- list/describe specific concrete examples of an abstract concept such as loving, forgiving, worshiping, serving;
- express their feelings about God, or about their experiences and needs;
- synthesize their thinking as they put ideas into words;
- record ways they put Scripture truths into practice in daily life;
- show love to others (for example, writing letters to elderly or ill people; writing thank-you notes to parents, caregivers or the priest; making “I will help you” coupons in which they offer to perform errands, etc.);
- improve their recall of Scripture events by organizing and writing information about the Scripture story.

Tips for Leading Writing Activities

- Write on chalkboard or paper any words that children need to know how to spell.
- Let a non-writer record his or her ideas on a tape recorder. Later, write or type these ideas and add them to the project being worked on.
- Let children work together, making sure one person in the group is skilled enough to write the ideas of the group.
- Ask a group to dictate a story or letter for you to write.
- A child’s creative writing efforts are usually more productive when the teacher made

an effort to stimulate thinking.

- Show and discuss pictures or objects to get ideas flowing.
- Provide “story starters” (partially described situations which children build on or complete).
- Suggest a problem for children to solve.
- Before children begin writing, encourage them to talk about possible ideas they might use.

Drama Activities

Drama activities such as role-plays, skits, puppets, pantomime, etc. are valuable learning opportunities because of the process the child experiences, not because of the quality of the final performance. Scripture stories come alive when children act them out, and Scriptural truth is seen to be relevant when applied to contemporary situations.

Benefits of Drama Activities

- A child portraying a Scripture character will clearly recall what that person said and did.
- A child speaking through a simple puppet may express thoughts and feelings that would not likely be spoken otherwise.
- Planning and then acting out a situation will push children to think about the application of Scriptural truth to a real-life circumstance.
- Dramatic activities provide a unique opportunity to briefly step into another person’s shoes, and experience for the moment some of his or her attitudes and feelings.
- Acting out specific examples of loving, sharing, kindness, friendliness, caring and helping gives concrete meaning to these otherwise abstract words.

Tips for Leading Drama Activities

- A good way to introduce drama in your class is to begin by reading the Scripture story narration while class members pantomime the appropriate action. Later, students may read dialogue parts in the story.
- If possible, make simple props to help stimulate children’s thinking.
- If children feel unsure of themselves, they will sometimes try to cover up their insecurity by acting silly. To prevent this:
 - Start with very simple stories/situations with a minimum of dialogue.
 - Talk over the story/situation in enough detail so children feel sure of what to do.
 - Demonstrate how a specific part or action might be acted out or pantomimed (or let a volunteer do this). Then let several children show how they would do it.
 - If a child pauses during the drama, ask a question to help him or her remember the action of the story or think of what to do next.
 - Don’t force a child to act out a story or situation, but do involve him or her in other ways: planning, evaluating, prop-making. Encourage participation by suggesting that a shy child take a part with little or no speaking.
- When presenting role-plays of contemporary situations, provide several alternatives

of ways a character might respond to the problem presented. Allow children to choose the option they feel best illustrates the concept being taught.

Oral Communication

Talking is a part of most other types of activities, but it can also be the major ingredient in a variety of interesting and valuable activities (brainstorming, interviewing, case studies, Scripture reading, etc.). Many children respond well to activities that encourage them to verbally express their thoughts and feelings. Since the focus of oral activities is on what the child says, the teacher must phrase appropriate questions and then listen with sensitivity and understanding.

For example:

- Children enjoy thinking of questions to use in an interview of a Scripture character, a church leader, an adult with specialized knowledge, a special guest, etc.
- Involving children in retelling the Scripture story increases retention and gives children the opportunity to put the main truth the story conveys in their own words.
- Discussing ways of putting a Scriptural truth into practice can involve every child in offering ideas on the practical implications of God's Word.

Benefits of Oral Communication Activities

Oral communication activities allow children to:

- share their needs, interests, concerns, understanding (and misunderstanding), and possible solutions to problems;
- be heard by someone who will listen attentively to what they are saying. (Children are often with people who hear their words, but do not listen with understanding to what they are saying.);
- increase their listening skills;
- improve their Scripture memory skills.

Tips for Using Oral Communication Activities

- Establish a procedure whereby children take turns recording any group ideas or discussions.
- When a child or group of children begin to dominate an oral activity, set guidelines. Say, for example, "Sue, we like to hear your good ideas, but we need to hear from two other people before you talk again."
- Give gentle encouragement to a child who is hesitant to participate. Begin by asking him or her a non-threatening question requiring a minimum answer. Then affirm the child's response.
- Suggest that each child turn to the person next to him or her to talk over a question or an idea.
- Children enjoy recording their answers to a question on a tape recorder.

Games

Play and learn! Often children are not aware of the direct learning value of a game, but they participate enthusiastically because they enjoy the game. Games are helpful tools for involving children in an enjoyable way to discover, use and remember Scriptural truths and verses.

For example:

- matching Scripture words with their definitions can give the teacher an opportunity to ask children to further review and discuss words they have defined;
- playing “20 Questions” (students ask 20 yes- or no- questions to discover the answer) about Scripture characters can lead children to think of varied actions or qualities of each character;
- Scripture verse puzzles give repeated opportunities to review the meaning and application of the verses.

Benefits of Games

Through games the child can:

- discover new information
- review Scriptural truths
- develop skill in using the Scripture and research materials
- reinforce skills through practice
- apply Scriptural truths
- memorize Scripture verses
- increase his or her skill in interacting in a group situation (taking turns, being fair and honest).

Tips for Leading Games

1. Explain rules clearly and simply. It’s helpful to write the rules to the game. Make sure you explain rules step by step.

2. Offer a “practice round.” When playing a game for the first time with your class, play it a few times “just for practice.” Children will learn the rules best by actually playing the game.

3. Choose games appropriate to the skill level of your class. If you know that some children in your class are not able to read or write as well as others, avoid playing games which depend solely on that skill for success. When playing a game in which students must answer questions, suggest that the student whose turn it is may answer the question or ask a member of his or her team to answer the question.

4. Vary the process by which teams are formed. Allow students to group themselves into teams of three or four members each. Play the game one time. Then announce that the person on each team who is wearing the most (red) should rotate to another team. Then play the game again. As you repeat this rotation process, vary the method of rotation so that students play

with several different children each time.

Service Projects

Service projects allow a teacher to take a class beyond simply hearing about obeying God, talking about obeying God and even planning ways of obeying God. Acts of service done as part of a group are effective ways to help children actually begin obeying God by assisting others.

For example:

- A class may do an art, drama or music activity in order to benefit another class or group.
- Children may work together to care for church facilities (pick up litter, pull weeds, clean closets, sort pictures, etc.).
- Children may plan a class party to which they invite non-churched friends.
- Children may adopt a “grandparent” or a child in a hospital.

Benefits of Service Project Activities

Service projects that grow out of Scripture lessons can help children:

- encourage one another to do what God’s Word teaches;
- experience the joy of giving to others;
- accept responsibility to complete a task;
- learn to work together;
- recognize that God’s Word leads His people to action.

Tips for Involving Children in Service Projects

- Clearly explain to children how their work will benefit others. If possible, allow children time to brainstorm ideas to help others.
- If the service project will last more than a week or two, consider making a chart or poster on which to record your progress.