

EARLY ELEMENTARY LEADER GUIDE

CONTENTS

- Introduction to *The Story for Children* Curriculum
- Components of the Early Elementary Curriculum
- Using *The Story* in Different Teaching/Learning Formats
- Using the Parents' Page
- Launch Activity Idea—Meet the Authors Day
- Early Elementary Parent Letter
- Lesson Plan Template

INTRODUCTION TO *THE STORY*

Your church is embarking on a wonderful adventure. Children, youth, and adults will enter into God's story, the Bible, in new and life-changing ways. The Bible is, after all, a book of stories. The Bible is a book of stories where God is the main character. The Bible is a book of stories given to us by that same God in order to transform our lives.

As you move chronologically through the Bible, children, youth, and adults will engage creatively and interactively with each story, walking away with one point to remember from each story. Families will have the opportunity to talk around the same Bible story each week and everyone in your church who participates will have a basis of discussion with other members of your church. Each week a different Bible story will come alive for all ages in your congregation.

This curriculum was developed to allow for maximum flexibility. You can use it for mid-week programming or Sunday programming but it is not necessarily limited to use at those times. The curriculum will work in a variety of teaching/learning formats and time frames.

This guide will introduce you to tips for using the children's curriculum in a variety of educational formats and help you to use the parts and pieces of the curriculum to their best advantage for your particular setting and group.

Entering into God's story in creative and meaningful ways is an important piece of the spiritual formation of children, youth, and adults. This curriculum is a wonderful tool for introducing your church members to the amazing stories of God's entry into the lives of men and women and reminding them that God is in the midst of their lives too. Godspeed on this adventure.

THE STORY AND EARLY ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN (GRADES 1–3)

The lessons in the curriculum for early elementary-age children are divided into several parts.

The Bible Story

The Bible stories in the curriculum are designed to be told in kinesthetic and interactive ways. It's important that you plan to tell the stories this way as this will engage the children in the story in ways that will help them vividly remember the story. Each story ends with a debriefing time. This debriefing time is most effective when used with *The Story* Elementary Trading Cards recommended in the lesson plan. The debriefing time helps children make sense of the story in their present-day circumstances and helps them to remember the Bible Point.

The Learning Activities

Each lesson begins with the “Come Together” learning activity. This activity is designed to focus the children’s attention on the point and the facts of the Bible story.

After the Bible story is told the children are invited into the “Explore More” activities. These activities engage the children in the Bible story in creative and interactive ways. The lesson plan offers several “Explore More” activities. You may choose one activity which best suits your group and meeting space or you may choose to do all of the activities. Please be aware that many of the “Explore More” activities require an abundance of supplies, so please plan your use of these activities ahead of time so you have plenty of time to gather the supplies and prepare the activity.

Skits

Each lesson is accompanied by an age-appropriate skit focusing on the point of the Bible story. These skits may be used each week, some weeks, or not at all. The use of the skits depends on the duration of your meeting time and your ability to produce the skits effectively for the children. The skits might be best used at the end of the lesson, after the “Explore More” activities. They can also be used at the opening of a lesson to introduce themes to a large group setting. Make sure you offer the children a debriefing time after the skits so they are able to make the connection between the skits and the Bible story point.

In order to use the skits as part of your lesson time you might recruit a team to perform these skits each week for the children or perhaps you could use some of your older children or middle schoolers to perform the skits each week.

USING THE STORY IN DIFFERENT TEACHING/LEARNING FORMATS

We realize that churches of different sizes and styles will want to use *The Story* curriculum. The curriculum has been designed to be flexible in its ability to be used effectively in a variety of teaching/learning formats.

One Room Schoolhouse

You may not have enough grade school-aged children to divide into age level classes so you must put all the ages (grades 1–4 or 1–6) in one classroom together. You can use *The Story* curriculum in this teaching/learning format. You will need at least two teachers or a teacher and a helper. They will be responsible for telling the story and leading each of the activities.

You will need to use the Early Elementary age level of the curriculum and you may need to experiment a bit to find the right mix of activities. You always need to keep in mind the different developmental levels of the children in the class realizing, for example, that it may take longer for a first grader to complete an activity requiring manual dexterity than it will a third grader. And if you have a couple of older grade school children in the group, you will need to offer them classroom opportunities to keep them interested as the weeks go by. You might check out the “Explore More” activities in the Older Elementary curriculum and have one of your volunteers lead these children in that activity. You might enlist them as helpers with the younger children or give them other jobs like setting out the supplies or performing the skits each week. If it seems that the older kids in your group are resisting any attempt to integrate them into the classroom with the younger children (give this a few weeks before you decide this is the case) you may want to see if you could integrate them into your youth group.

You may choose to use one or all of the “Explore More” activities. How many you use really depends on the length of your meeting time. If you choose to use only one of the “Explore More” activities choose the one that seems most suited to the ages and energy level of the children represented in your group.

Please be aware that the activities do require a variety of supplies. This is what helps make them effective with the children. Allow yourself enough planning time to be able to collect the supplies you need.

Age Graded Classrooms (1–2 teachers per room)

You may have enough children to divide them into age-segregated classrooms (first grade, second grade, etc., or first/second grade, third/fourth grade, etc.) with six to twelve children in each classroom. You'll need two teachers or a teacher and a helper with each age group. If your groups are age-specific (first, second, third grades, etc.) use the Early Elementary curriculum for grades 1–4 and the Later Elementary curriculum for grades 5–6. (In some circumstances, you may use the Later Elementary curriculum for fourth grade. You need to decide this given the maturity level of your fourth-graders.)

Depending on your meeting time you may choose to involve the children in one or all of the “Explore More” activities. If you choose to use only one of these activities, choose the one that is the most suitable for the age, interests, and energy level of each group. Please be aware that the activities do require a variety of supplies. This is what helps make them effective with the children. Allow yourself enough planning time to be able to collect the supplies you need.

If you choose to use the skits appropriate for each age level, you may need to recruit a group of volunteers who will present the skits to each class each week. You'll need to schedule the skits into each classroom at different times, have more than one skit team, or bring the children together in one meeting area or classroom for the skits.

Age-Graded Classrooms (2 or more age-specific classes with their own teachers, in one room)

You may have enough children in specific age groups to have, say, a first- or second-grade department (12 or more kids of the same age in one classroom) where kids are divided into smaller groups, each with their own teacher. There may also be someone in the classroom who oversees these teachers and classes, such as a department leader.

With this type of setting you have some choices in how you facilitate the lesson plan. You may do the “Come Together” activity either in the separate groups or as a large group. Some of the “Come Together” activities require more floor space than might be available to each smaller class. You might choose to sometimes do this activity in the large group and sometimes in the small groups depending on the activity itself. If you choose to do the activity in the large group it could be led by a teacher or the department leader.

Many of the Bible stories require movement by the children as part of hearing the story and this may require lots of classroom space. We recommend doing the Bible story in the large group setting. This could be led by the department leader or one of the other volunteers who has a talent for storytelling.

After the Bible story the children would form into small groups and complete the “Explore More” activities. Depending on your time frame, the classes may do one or all of these activities. If you choose to do only one of the “Explore More” activities you may allow your teachers to choose which one they would like to do with their particular group or you may choose the one activity for the whole group.

If you choose to use the skits, plan to have them performed after the “Explore More” activity as a way of reinforcing the point of the Bible story. Bring the children into the large group for the skits.

After this send the children and volunteers back to their small groups for the wrap-up activities.

Learning Center Model

(Use the Early Elementary curriculum with this model.) In this teaching/learning model you’ll have the children in age-graded groups guided by volunteers who might be called shepherds, small group leaders, or some other name of your choosing. The job of these volunteers is to guide the group through all the activities, building relationships, and managing and modeling behavior. These volunteers are only responsible for leading the “Come Together” and wrap-up activities with the children. You, then, have another group of volunteers who are the activity center leaders. These volunteers are responsible for leading the Bible story, “Explore More” activities, and skits.

The children may be involved in these activities in two ways. You may set up classrooms or meeting spaces as learning centers, meaning you would have a “Bible Story” space, an “Explore More” space, and a skit space. The children then move with their guides from one center to the next according to a set schedule. If it is important to you that all the children hear the Bible story first, all the children can go to the “Bible Story” space first and then spread out to the other centers. This format gives you the option of decorating the rooms to reflect the weekly Bible story if you should choose to do that.

The other option is for the activity center leaders to move from space to space while the children stay in the same place.

It is good to remember that with this teaching/learning format the more children you have the more activity centers and leaders you will need. You may need more than one leader at each activity center.

Large Group/Small Group

(Use the Early Elementary curriculum for this model and separate out your fifth- and sixth-graders.) In this teaching/learning format the children are in either age-level groups or mixed-age groups. How you do this depends on how many children attend your program. Each group is shepherded by one or two small group leaders. To use *The Story* curriculum in this format the children should start out in their small groups for the “Come Together” activity. Then, the large group would come together for the story time. A designated Bible story leader would then lead the children in the interactive Bible story. Then the children once again form their small groups where the small group leaders lead them in one or all of the “Explore More” activities. Whether you do one or all of these activities depends on the length of your meeting time. Be aware that some of the “Explore More” activities require a variety of supplies and adequate floor space. Please make sure you plan far enough ahead to have the necessary supplies and room for each activity. If you choose to use the skits included in *The Story* curriculum the best time to use them is after the “Explore More” activities. Bring the children back in the large group to enjoy the skits. Remember to alert the small group leaders to ways to connect the skits to the point of the day’s Bible story. Send the children back into their small groups for any wrap-up activities you choose to do.

Note that the Later Elementary curriculum is most appropriate for older children (typically grades 4-6).

USING THE PARENTS’ PAGE

Christian parents want to nurture their children in God’s stories in the Bible but often they feel they don’t know how to do it. *The Story* curriculum includes a Parents’ Page for each lesson which offers parents ideas for interacting with their entire family around the week’s Bible story.

Each Parents’ Page offers ideas for how to use these pages in the family. The points for the Bible story are included and families are given “Table Talk” questions that can be adapted for each age level. These questions can be used to explore the Bible story at the dinner table, in the car, or at other times when the family is together. Each Parents’ Page also includes a “Living the Faith” activity. This might be a game, art project, or other fun activity the whole family can engage in around the Bible story. And, lastly, these pages include an “Extra Mile” activity for those families who still crave more learning activities around the week’s Bible story.

Families do not have to do all the activities in the Parents’ Page. Some weeks they may only get to the “Table Talk” questions while other weeks they may find they have time to do more of the activities and spend more time with the Bible story.

LAUNCH ACTIVITY IDEA—MEET THE AUTHORS DAY

Inspire children and their families to participate in *The Story* campaign with an exciting launch event—**Meet the Authors Day**. This event will generate interest in what families will participate in and learn at church and at home.

Meet the Authors Day is an event that brings Bible characters who wrote books of the Bible to your church. During this event, Bible authors will tell about their lives, answer questions, and even sign autographs. Small groups will rotate between the many authors, listening and participating in the presentations. Equipped with the knowledge that these authors wrote the books of the Bible they will be studying throughout the year, children are sure to be attentive and want to know more.

Get volunteers to participate in the presentation. Adjust the following roles based on how many volunteers you have. You may need to have fewer teams or each team can just include an author and stage manager.

BASIC STEPS FOR PLANNING

1. Set your date and location, making sure you have sufficient time and space for small groups of children and adults to visit each character and participate in a story and Q&A time.
2. Get volunteers or other staff to participate in the presentation. Each team needs members to do the following responsibilities:

The Author

- Knows 3–4 different “stories” that he can tell about his or her life.

Understory Character

- Prepares a 1–2 minute “story” concerning their involvement with the author/character. Obeying God’s will, thanking God, or beseeching God should be paramount.
- **Possible Ideas:** David’s great-grandmother Ruth, pregnant Sarah with Abraham, the mother of the baby saved by Solomon, the three sailors who threw Jonah overboard, the gospel writers, Paul’s convert Lydia, or Cornelius.

The Stage Manager

- Is responsible for everything that goes on “the stage.”
- Makes sure that all costumes are secured.
- Controls the conversational flow and the props for the stage.
- May address the central actor, the understory actor, the facilitator or the crowd.

The Facilitator

- Controls the people who are around the area—asks if they want an autograph, do they have questions, etc. Communicates to stage manager.
1. Choose these teams well in advance and give them time to prepare what will be needed. This could take a week or two of meetings. Sets, costumes, and scripts need to be prepared.
 2. Have a dress rehearsal, making sure you give sufficient time for each presentation and allow transition time from each station. People will be rotating from author to author.
 3. Create excitement and buzz about this great event!

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FOR THE AUTHORS

- What parts of the Bible did you write?
- How long did it take you?
- What language did you use when you wrote?
- Tell us about a time when God showed you something about himself.
- Of all the important things God had you write in our Bible, what is one important message you want us to know?
- Do you think your message from a long time ago is still useful for us today?
- Was it hard to get people to listen and understand that you were working with God to help them?
- How did you feel when you first realized that God was going to use you as a helper to his people here on Earth?
- Did you want to help God right away or was it hard to obey his Word and message?
- Did your family understand the reasons behind your work and writing?

EARLY ELEMENTARY EXTENSIONS

When you gather into your classes/age groups, be prepared for the children to have questions and comments about meeting the Bible authors. Discuss with them the importance of knowing something about these great and wise church leaders that God used to communicate his Word to us and to the people of Bible times.

- Talk about the names of the people. Are the names a little unusual?
- Talk about the main ideas of the writings.
- Choose one author and have the children draw a picture of him or her, labeling it with the name of the character. Talk about this one message.
- Have the children design and draw thank-you notes for the Bible characters or have one large card folded and ready for the class to decorate and sign.
- Have volunteers pretend to be an author and tell the class what they remember about the one they choose.

- Have the children work in pairs to write two or three more questions to give to the author(s) of their choice. Pass these questions on and when the author revisits the classes, have the questions addressed.
- Talk about the experience of meeting these authors. Why is it nice to meet people like this? What can you learn?
- Discuss other stories of the Bible that the children would like to meet the author of, and why. Design invitations for that author.

THE STORY FOR CHILDREN: EARLY ELEMENTARY PARENT LETTER

Send a letter to the parents of the children in your group to familiarize them with *The Story For Children* curriculum program and its highlights for their child's age/grade level. If you think it necessary, be sure to include the fact that *The Story for Children: Early Elementary* curriculum uses the storybook Bible *The Story for Children* as an additional resource. If your church is not providing the storybook Bible for your class, it may be helpful and fun for children to have it on hand at home.

The letter on the following page, or a version of it, can be cut and pasted onto church letterhead or whatever you might use to send communications home to members. Be sure to encourage parental involvement in the children's program and follow-through at home. These two things are key to the formation of their child's faith.

Dear Parents:

Blessings to all of you and your family! Welcome to The Story for Children! We are pleased and honored that your child is with us and going to be participating in The Story for Children Curriculum.

As you may know, this program has thirty-one lessons—thirty-one beautiful messages of God's love and care for his children. Each lesson is designed so that your child will be made completely aware of God's message in each one through the Bible verses, Bible Points, the stories, and various activities.

While we as a class explore God's Word, we encourage you to extend that exploration to your home. Share your own love of his Word with your child, talk about what you are learning in your adult class, allow your child time to freely talk about and ask questions about what is being learned. Be sure to encourage sharing of the activity sheets or have your child tell you the Bible story that has been highlighted each week. Even allow him to tell you about some of the discussions that have taken place and continue them at dinner or family reflection time! Look for the weekly Parents' Page. Read and do some of the activities that are part of the Parents' Page sent home each week.

This is a family experience. God is the all-loving Father; we are his children. As The Story unfolds for all of us here at _____ share the experience with your child. We have been blessed with this incredible story! Let's help make our children incredible and faith-filled storytellers.

God's blessings,

LESSON PLANNING

Prepare in advance for your class. When you prepare in advance, you will be more comfortable, which will allow children to get the most from the lesson. Children can and do ask questions that do not have easy or immediate answers. In your preparation, try to prepare for questions your class may ask. If you do not know the answer, do not make up an answer. Share with your class that you do not know and either look for the answer together or find the answer after class.

Seasoned teachers as well as new ones may find a lesson plan very helpful. Information from the teacher lesson pages can be summarized into keywords and a glance at the plan will help if you get distracted. A lesson plan is also helpful for the volunteers or helpers in your classroom, so everyone is aware of the intentions for the day's lesson.

As a teacher of young elementary-age children you already know this: Young children are very literal and they want answers!

- Elementary children are starting to think beyond the facts and details to understand there is more to the story than what they can see. Help them distinguish between the facts of the story and the assumptions we make.
- Challenge children to think about how the verses could apply to their daily lives. Children can rewrite verses or points in their own words or perform Bible stories as skits, songs, or raps.
- Relate things right back to them; children are naturally egocentric and love it when things are related back to them.
- Take into consideration that there are many learning styles. Some children love to listen to stories being read, others love moving around and participating in the telling. Still others want to be creative and draw or sculpt Bible characters or ideas. Make use of the variety of options that are provided in the lesson pages. And be sure to add your ideas onto your lesson plan template.
- Review, review, review. Go over the Bible Point and verse many times. Dance, sing, clap, shout, and whisper the words and ideas so that your class can more easily remember the details.

THE STORY FOR CHILDREN: EARLY ELEMENTARY LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

Week _____

BIBLE POINT TO TEACH:

General Goal(s):

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES:

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

STEP-BY-STEP PROCEDURES:

Come Together

Hear the Word

EXPLORE MORE

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDEPENDENT/AT HOME PRACTICE:

CLOSURE (SKIT?):

ADAPTATIONS (FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES):

EXTENSIONS (FOR GIFTED STUDENTS):