

Fostering Meaningful Conversations at the Intersection of Life and Faith

Rev. Dr. Stacy Johnson Myers
First Congregational Church
River Falls, Wisconsin

Today's Goals

When you leave this presentation, you will:

- **Have a theological/pedagogical framework to support Intersection Conversations.**
- **Understand a concrete strategy for guiding Intersection Conversations.**
- **Have at least one new idea for your ministry.**

Agenda

- **Teaching & Learning in the Church**
- **Thomas Groome: Shared Praxis**
- **Conversations at the Intersection of Life and Faith with Children**
- **Discipleship Traits**
- **An Example of Curricular Support**
- **Questions & Discussion**



Education in the church is not about “teaching religion.”

Education in the church proclaims God’s Way and invites learners into a life of discipleship.

Learning in the Church

So, we:

- **Respect childhood & children's development.**
- **Show children love, forgiveness, grace, acceptance.**
- **Help children reflectively enter Bible stories & interpret them.**
- **Enable children to creatively explore theological ideas.**
- **Support children when they ask questions and help them listen to each other.**
- **Welcome children into the language of faith, practices of the church, and work of the faith community.**
- **Encourage children to connect the Christian tradition to their lives & the world.**

Thomas H. Groome

Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision

Shared praxis:

*...a group of Christians sharing in dialogue
their critical reflection on present action
in light of the Christian Story and Vision...*

Present Action=All aspects of human activity

**Christian Story= The whole of the Christian faith
tradition**

**Christian Vision= The lived response to the
Christian Story**



Meaningful Conversations at Church Bring Together...

The lives of learners

- My friend hurt my feelings/I hurt my friend's feelings...
- I hope...
- I'm worried because...
- My grandpa died...
- At school/at lunch/at basketball...
- My sister...I have a new brother...
- No one at school likes...
- I'm not good at...
- I belong to...
- I can help...
- I'm trying to...

The Christian faith tradition

- God's Way
- Christian Story and Vision (T. Groome)
- Scripture's big story and individual stories
- Jesus' life, death, resurrection
- Sacraments
- The Church's story/my church's story
- Discipleship
- Prayer
- Worship
- Love, grace, sin, forgiveness, redemption, repentance, abundant life

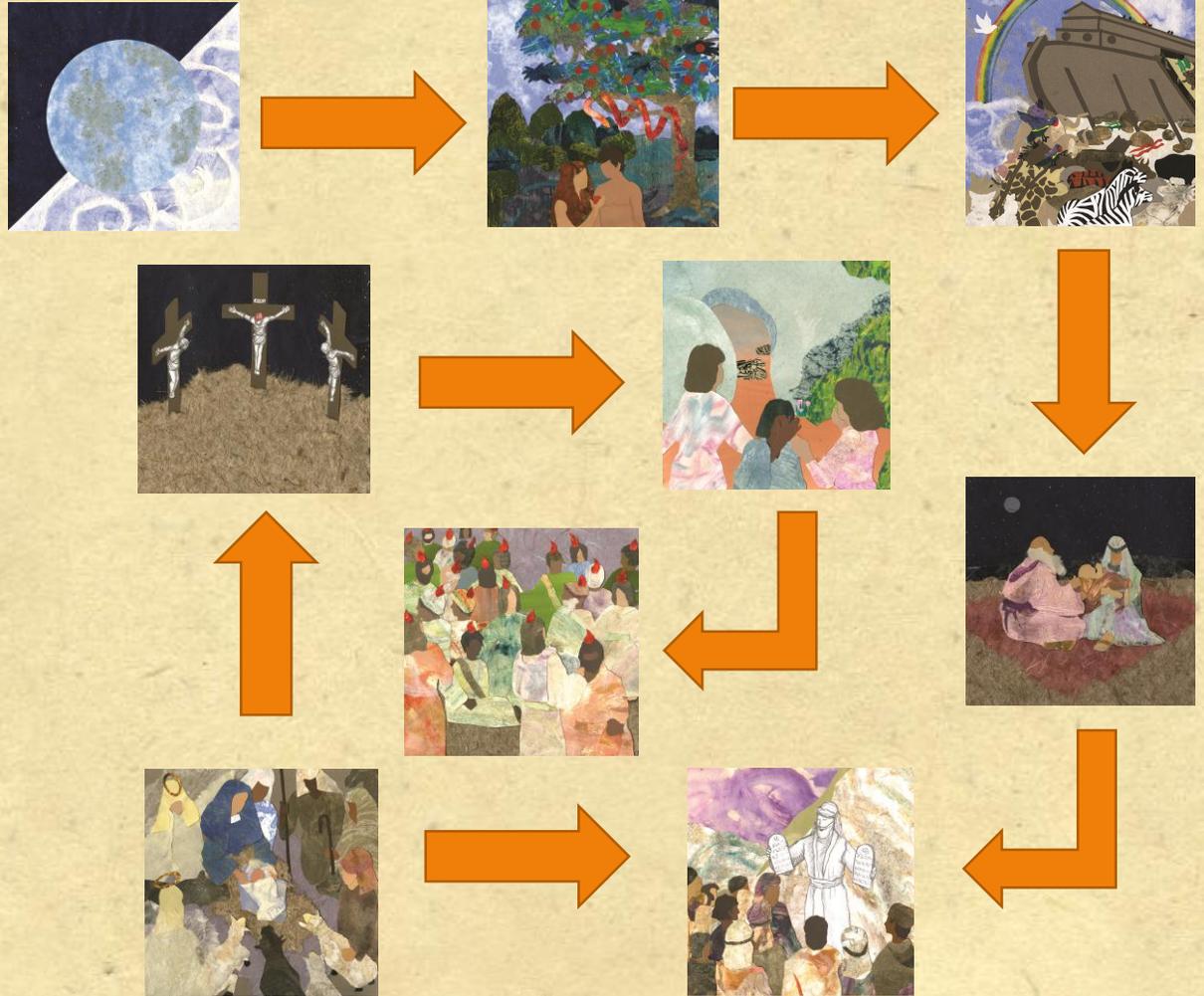
Slight Detour: Biblical Literacy and Interpretation

As People of the Way we ask:

How do we live in this world as
we anticipate the world that is to
come?

We turn to scripture for:

- Revelation
- Encouragement
- A vision of what can be



Why Conversation?

It's a component of Shared Praxis, but also...

Conversations...

- Are where learning takes place.
- Encourage speaking and listening.
- Foster turn-taking.
- Expand vocabulary and understanding.
- Promote critical thinking and curiosity.
- Support relationships.
- Develop social/emotional awareness.



Recognizing Meaningful Conversations...



Meaningful conversations...

- **Matter.**
- **Leave ideas to linger and grow.**
- **Engage all learners.**
- **Encourage “thinking for ourselves in the company of others” (Michael Roth).**
- **Don’t answer all the questions.**
- **Draw on previous learning and conversations.**
- **Connect classroom learning to the stuff of daily life and the ministry of the church.**
- **Happen formally and informally.**

How?

- **Establish a structure and a predictable pattern for conversations.**
- **Teach and support the skills needed for speaking and listening.**
- **Have something important and worthwhile to talk about.**





Establish the Intersection

The lives of learners

A centerpiece everyone can engage that taps into:

- A shared experience
- A common concern
- A new consideration

Children's Literature

The Christian faith tradition

A centerpiece everyone can engage that taps into:

- An aspect of the tradition
- An element of the church's life
- An invitation to discipleship

Bible/Faith Stories, Images

Conversation
at the
Intersection

Why Children's Literature? Why Art?

Children's Literature

- Provides a common experience
- Focuses on experiences outside kids' own
- Points beyond itself (as parables)
- Draws on imagination and creative thought
- Encourages critical thinking
- Invites interpretation
- Allows readers to analyze characters, situations, concepts

Biblical Art

- Provides a shared, ongoing experience
- Supports viewers as they learn to see and interpret images/color/lines/emotion
- Encourages critical thinking
- Links images and biblical stories (tapping into two learning styles)
- Fosters biblical literacy and interpretation

Selecting Literature and Bible Stories

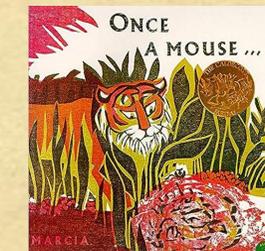
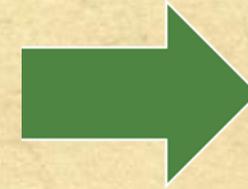
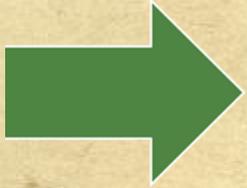
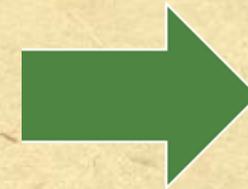
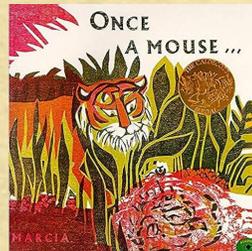
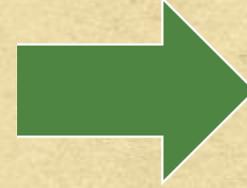
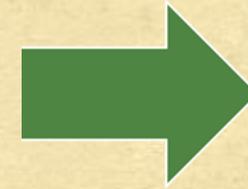
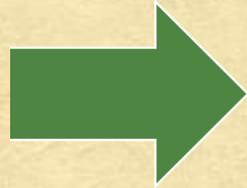
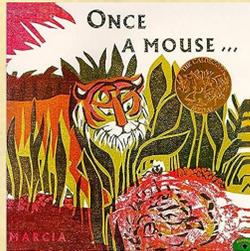
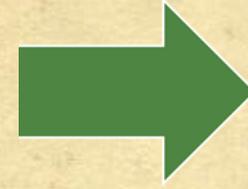
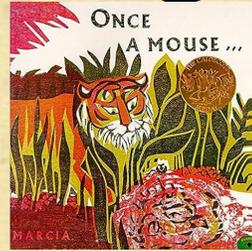
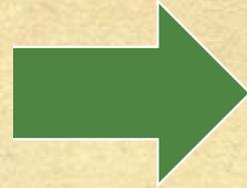
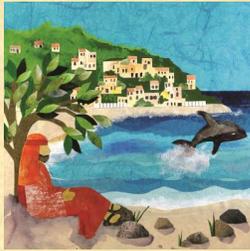
Children's Literature

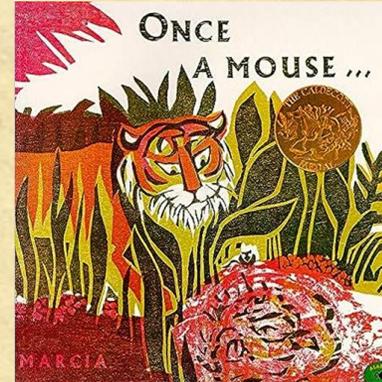
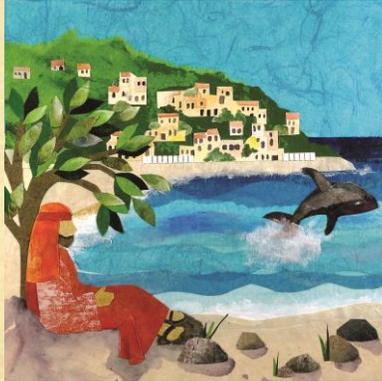
- Does the storyline work well?
- Is it developmentally appropriate?
- Does it expand ideas?
- Is it engaging?
- Will the illustrations augment the text?
- Do you support the way people/God are presented?
- Is the story strong enough to elicit opinions and discussion?

Bible Stories and Art

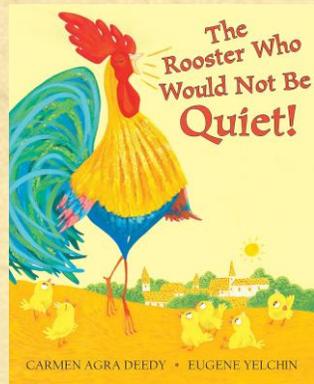
- Will the original text work?
- Does the retelling stay close to the text?
- Will the retelling compliment the developmental characteristics of the listeners?
- Does the retelling use inclusive language? Appropriate skin tones?
- Do the illustrations support the text? Are they capable of imbedding the story in listeners' imaginations?

A Road Map to Navigate the Intersection..



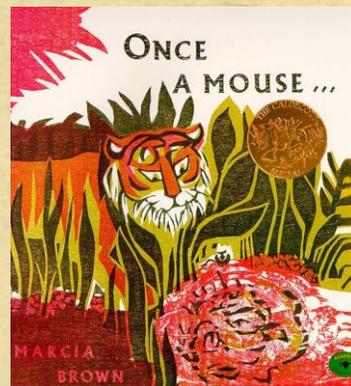
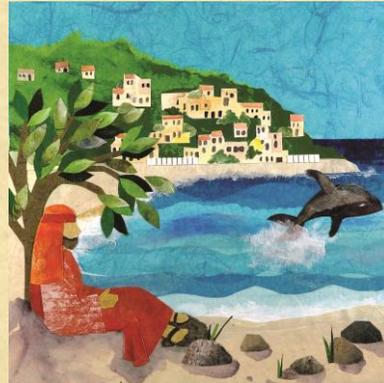


- Study the art. What do you notice? What else? Listen to the story. Match it to the art.
- Did Jonah deserve to be rescued? How so?
- Even though people in Nineveh changed, Jonah thought they should still be punished. Do you agree? How so? What did God do?
- Jonah was completely safe in the fish. When do you feel completely safe?
- Why do you think Hermit kept changing Mouse into bigger and bigger animals?
- If you were Mouse-Turned-Tiger, how would you treat other animals?
- Grace is getting something you haven't earned. Where do you notice grace in this story?
- How did Jonah respond to grace? How did Mouse-Turned-Tiger respond to grace?
- Has someone forgiven you? That's grace! Have you offered grace? (Share stories.)
- What's a good response to grace?
- What's a not-so-good response to grace?
- The Bible is filled with stories about God giving grace. What does that tell you about God?



- **The rooster broke the rules. Why?**
- **Do you think Mayor Pepe would set the rooster free if he promised he didn't sing? How so?**
- **The rooster said he sang for other people. Give examples of people who need others to talk for them.**
- **What kind of mayor is Pepe? Who stands up for justice in the story?**
- **Study the art. What do you notice? What else? Listen to the story. Match it to the art.**
- **How did the people welcome Jesus? If Jesus came to your town, how would you welcome him?**
- **Jesus was powerful. How did he use his power? How didn't he use his power?**
- **Why do you think the religious leaders did not like the noise? What makes a good leader?**
- **What do you think the stones would shout?**
- **Is it ever OK to break rules? How so?**
- **Think about school. When has someone needed someone else to speak for them? What happened?**
- **Is it easy or hard to be fair? How so?**
- **If you were a mayor (or a school patrol leader), what would you do? Not do?**
- **What do today's stories say about power?**

Facilitating Conversations: Ask Good Questions, Teach Strong Discussion Strategies



- In my opinion...
- I agree with _____ because...
- That's a good point. Also...
- I have a different point of view...
- This reminds me of...
- What do you mean by...
- Another example is...
- I hear what you're saying, but...
- I want to know more about...
- When this happened to me, I...

Young Children, Too!

The teacher wrote:

“The kids had lots of thoughtful questions and were very concerned about Moses parting the sea.”

Orion asked:

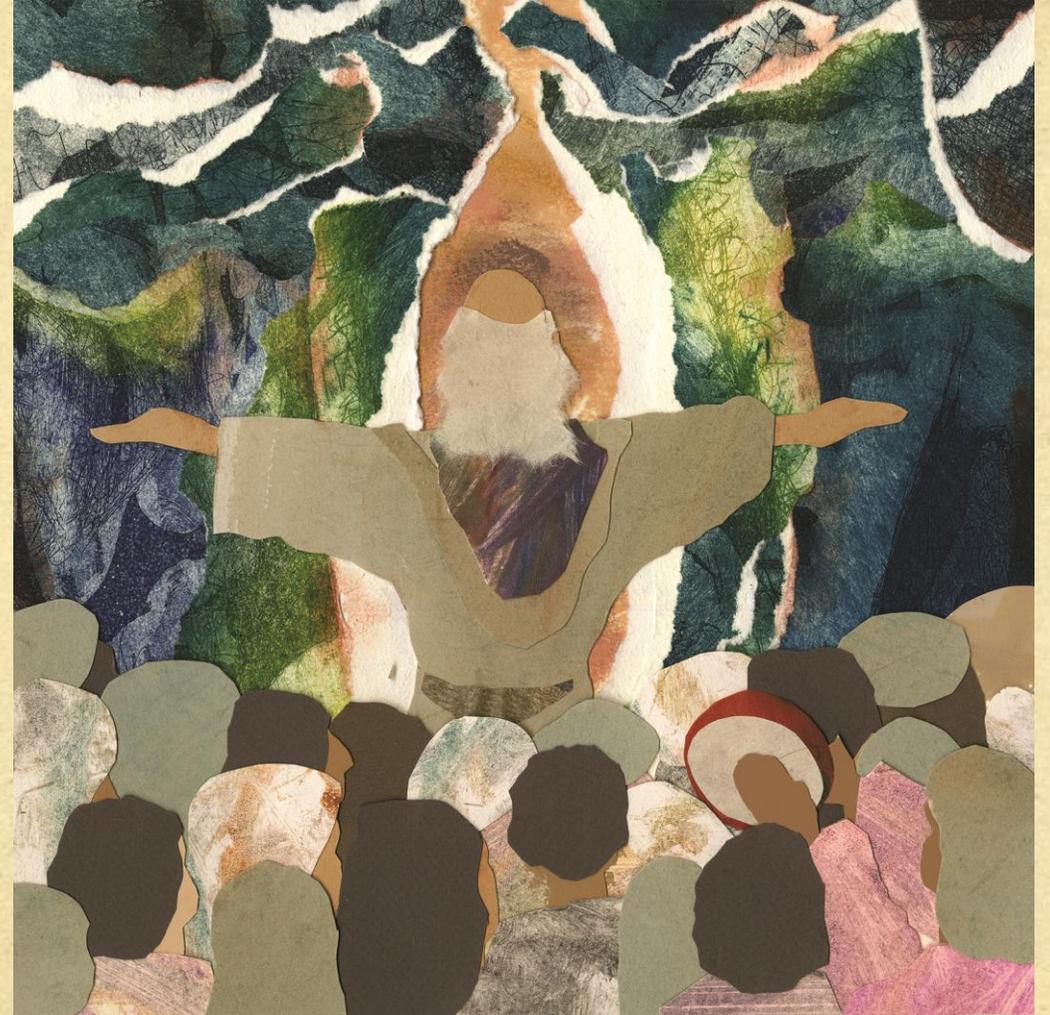
“What did the fish do? Could they get to their friends on the other side?”

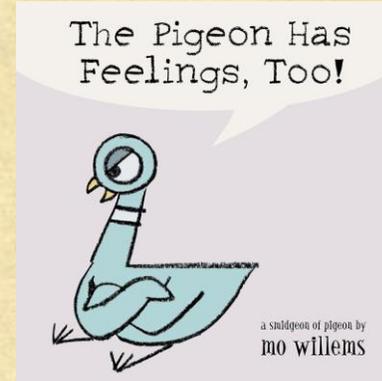
Sawyer suggested:

“Why didn’t Pharaoh change his mind? Maybe his mom and dad should talk to him and tell him that’s not nice.”

Nora offered:

“I can show Pastor Stacy my happy twirl!”





- Look at the art. What do you see? What else?
- Listen to the story. Match the art to the story.
- Jesus was angry. How can you tell in the picture that Jesus is angry?
- Jesus kicked over tables. Was that a good idea? How so? What good thing can you do when you're angry?
- Jesus had feelings just as you have feelings. Show a happy face...
- Pigeon looks angry. How can you tell from the outside how people feel on the inside?
- Are there right ways and wrong ways to show feelings? How so?
- Can people be told how to feel?
- Friends pay attention to each other's feelings. How can you tell if a friend is happy? Sad? Frustrated?
- Jesus said worship places are for praying. Prayers can be spoken. Prayers can be danced. Dance a thankful prayer.
- Sometimes anger is necessary and important. Think of a time you should be angry.



Chat Questions?

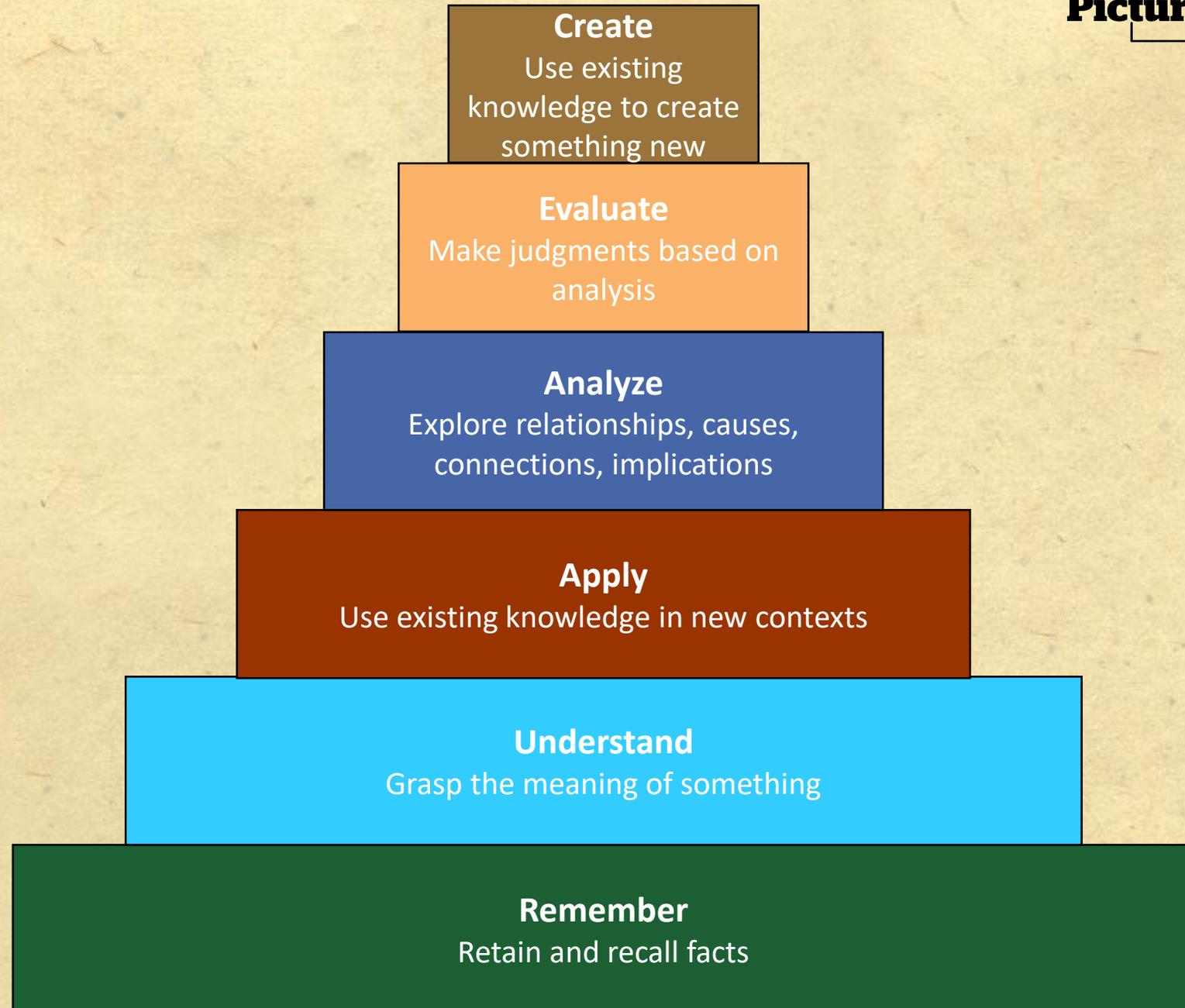
Pay Attention

Don't

- Ask questions (or too many) that can be answered with a yes/no.
- Use stories that are trite or moralistic.
- Present stories that require unlearning or relearning.
- Show images that unfairly depict Jesus.
- Allow some children to dominate and not be good listeners.
- Think adults have (or should have) all the answers.

Do

- Plan art/music/play/activities with a consistent theme—this keeps your intersection going.
- Use informal times for less structured (but still important) conversation.
- Focus on activities that support worship participation.
- Recognize that children's literature can span wide age ranges.
- Use familiar and unfamiliar literature.
- Provide resources to parents so they can have faith-based conversations at home.
- Focus on higher order thinking skills.



Know the Power of Informal Conversations

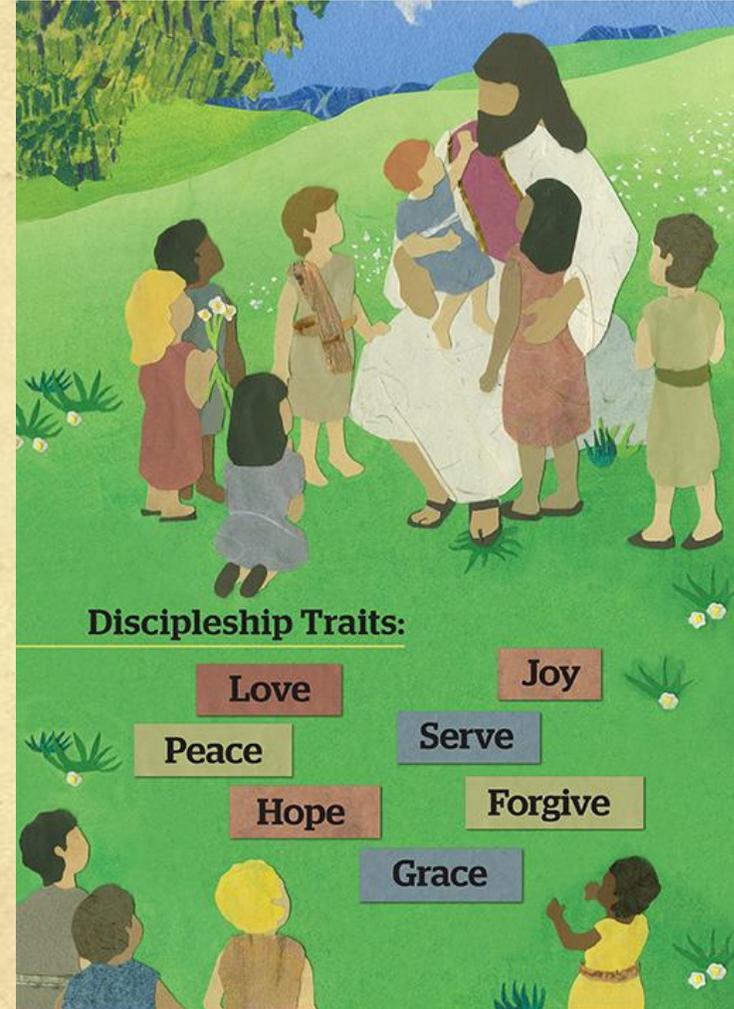
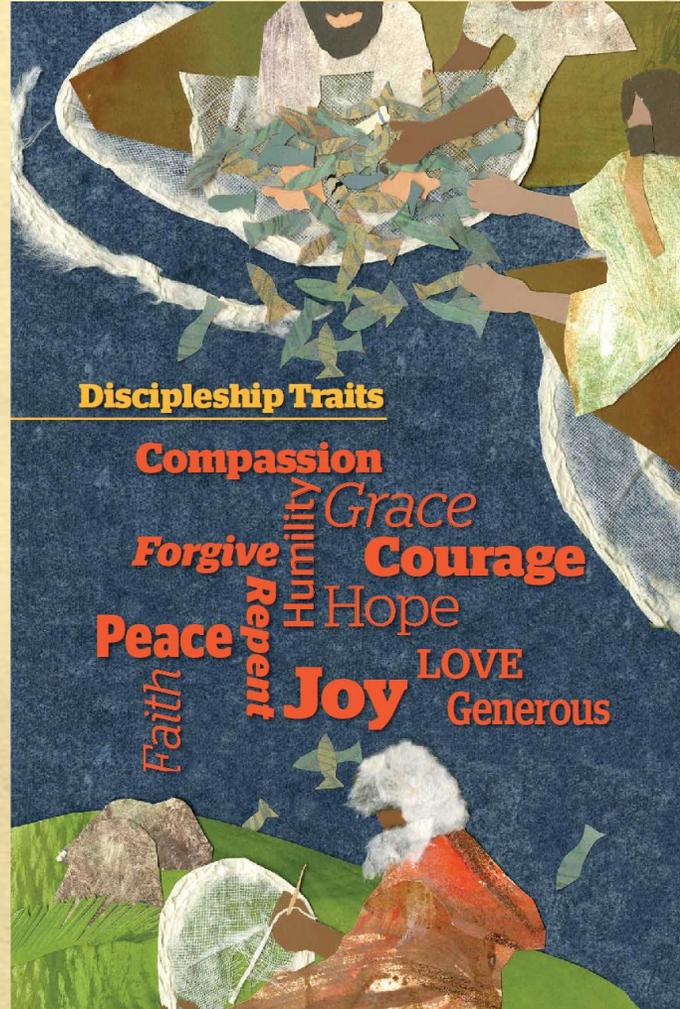


- What shapes do you see?
- What do the shapes all put together remind you of?
- What do you notice about the colors?
- Two paintings have circles. What do you think they represent?
- How are these paintings like a building you can make with blocks? How are they different?

Paul Klee: *Castle and Sun*, *Red Balloon*, *Architecture* (public domain)



Discipleship Traits

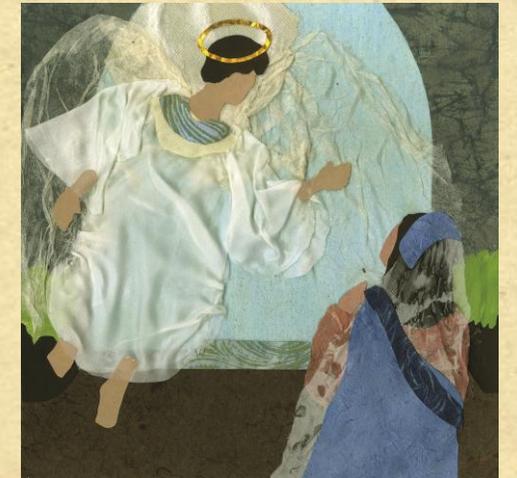




Curricular Support

Art

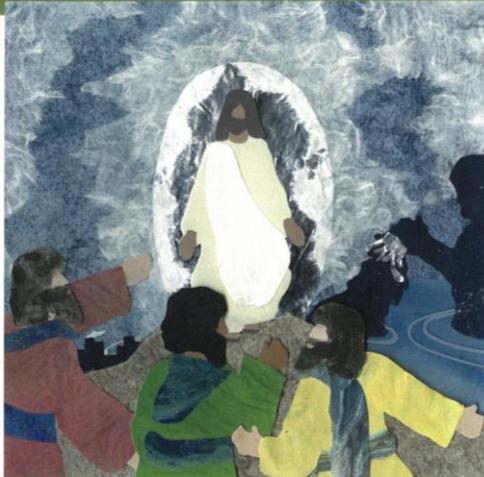
- **Draws viewers into biblical stories & embeds the image in their imaginations**
- **Depicts people with a variety of skin tones, no facial features**
- **Speaks to learners of all ages**
- **Increases biblical literacy and interpretation**
- **Becomes the basis of shared experience and conversation**



Curricular Support: Picture the Bible's KidLit

Jesus of Nazareth
Stories about Jesus' ministry

Picture the Bible™



Jesus Is Transfigured

This is my Son, the Beloved; Listen to him!
— Matthew 17:5

Jesus went to a high mountain with Peter, James, and John. Right in front of them Jesus was changed suddenly—his face was like the sun and his clothes were dazzling white. Moses and Elijah, ancient prophets, appeared. Peter said, "It's good to be here. Let's make three tents so we can stay." While Peter was talking, a cloud settled over them and the disciples heard God say, "This is my son. I love him. Listen to him!"

References

Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-9;
Luke 9:28-36

Background

Jesus' transfiguration is a challenging yet important story. In the church year, it marks the end of the season of Epiphany and foreshadows the beginning of Lent. In terms of Jesus' public ministry, his transfiguration is partway between his baptism and his crucifixion.

Ideas to keep in mind:

- *Trans* means across or change or beyond. Transfiguration means something is changed well beyond what it was. Transfiguration is the word we use to describe how Jesus' disciples both saw and understood Jesus in a completely different, changed way.
- At first, the transfiguration story seems like a straight-forward report, but then it becomes dream-like and surreal. The story is an example of Apocalyptic literature. It is creative and dramatic, perhaps even wild and crazy.
- Moses and Elijah are ancient heroes. Moses rescued the Israelites from slavery, led them through the Red Sea, gave them Ten Commandments, and brought them to the Promised Land. Elijah was a prophet and miracle worker and was taken up to heaven by a chariot and horses of fire. Moses represents God's Torah (teaching or law) and Elijah represents prophets who spoke God's words.
- This story reveals important ideas about Jesus. It says: "Look! Pay attention! See Jesus in all his splendor."
- At Jesus' baptism, the people heard God's words: "You are my son! I love you!" (in Mark and Luke, in Matthew it is "This is my son! I love him!"). Again, on the mountain top God repeats those words and adds "Listen to him!"
- What exactly Jesus looked like on the mountaintop, we have no way of knowing. We cannot know if Jesus **looked** different or if the disciples **saw** him differently. What we know is God wants us to listen to Jesus, do what Jesus does, and live as Jesus lived.

Insight

This strange story is an example of apocalyptic literature. "Apocalyptic" means "revelation" or "to reveal." Apocalyptic stories show — or reveal — something that is usually hidden. Often apocalyptic literature is dramatic, mysterious and strange, told to instruct people or tell them what to expect.

This story of Jesus' transfiguration on the mountain reveals who Jesus is. The message is clear: Jesus is God's son, loved by God and someone people should listen to. This is the same message the crowd heard when Jesus was baptized.

What will you tuck in your pocket?

What's the difference between looking and seeing?

Bible Story

Read "Transfiguration" in *Picture the Bible*, pages 70-71.

Study the art. What do you notice? What else? How does it match the story?

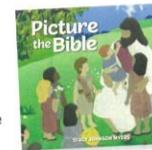
When Jesus was transfigured, or changed, what did the disciples see? What did they hear?

Moses gave people the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments told people how God wanted them to live. Elijah told people to stop doing wrong things and start living in God's way. How is Jesus similar to Moses? Elijah? How is Jesus different from Moses and Elijah?

Why do you think the disciples were afraid?

At first Peter was afraid, then he wanted to stay. Why might this be? Name a time you were afraid at first and then didn't want to leave or end what you were doing. Why might this happen to people?

Do some research. What did the voice from heaven say when Jesus was baptized? What did the voice say when Jesus was transfigured? Look at the *Picture the Bible* image of Jesus' baptism. How does it match the image of Jesus' transfiguration? Why might this be?



Children's Literature

If you want to see a whale

by Julie Fogliano
Illustrated by Erin E. Stead

Read If you want to see a whale and consider:

Why are waiting, looking, and wondering part of watching?

Why will distraction get in the way of seeing? What kinds of things distract you?

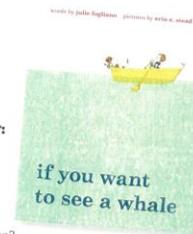
Do you think the boy knew he saw a whale? How so?

Is it possible to see something but not understand it? How so?

Authors write for a reason. What do you think the author of *If you want to see a whale* is saying in the book?

Where do you see the theme of "paying attention" in this story and the story of Jesus' transfiguration? What if the boy hadn't paid attention? What if the disciples hadn't paid attention?

What do you think Jesus wants you to pay attention to?



Creative project

Transform a Jar

On the mountain, Jesus transfigured in front of three disciples. Jesus was different—the disciples saw him differently—from before.

Be creative! See an old glass jar in a new way. Does it look like a vase?

Supplies:

- ❑ Glass jars from the recycling bin, label removed, cleaned and dried
- ❑ Colored tissue paper cut or torn into shapes
- ❑ Foam brushes
- ❑ Glossy Mod Podge
- ❑ Mod Podge glossy clear acrylic sealer (optional)



Directions:

1. Use the foam brush to make a thin layer of Mod Podge on one portion of the jar. Add tissue paper to the Mod Podge. Overlap tissue paper as desired.
2. Add a layer of Mod Podge to the top of the tissue paper.
3. Repeat the steps until the whole jar is covered. Add a final layer of Mod Podge over the whole jar to secure all the tissue. Let dry.
4. Spray with glossy sealer if desired. Add flowers and enjoy!

Note: To make Christmas vases, use red and gold tissue paper. After the final layer of Mod Podge, sprinkle with glitter. Make a variety of vases and deliver flowers on May Day or to home-bound folks in the congregation.

Prayer

One: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Let us pray. Forgiving God, sometimes we turn away from what you want us to see. Someone is lonely or hurt and we don't pay attention. Something needs to be done and we think someone else should do it. Remind us to see the world as you see it. Remind us to pay attention. We pray as Jesus taught us to pray, saying...

Copyright © 2023 First Congregational Church, River Falls, Wisconsin 54022. ■ 715-425-2052 ■ www.picturethebible.org
Published in the United States of America. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing from First Congregational Church, River Falls, Wisconsin.



**Questions?
Discussion?**

stacy@firstchurchrf.org