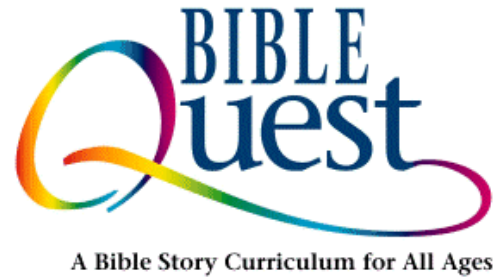


## Leader Article



## Create an Environment for Storytelling

When was the last time you heard a good story? Were you sitting at the kitchen table with a neighbor? In a restaurant with friends? Around a campfire? Visiting a retirement home? Talking with a relative? Chances are no matter where you were, you found these elements in the storytelling environment:

- a comfortable place to sit or gather
- something to eat or drink—a muffin, tea, coffee, or doughnut
- objects in the environment that stimulated storytelling—a photo, marshmallows, or candle

### Create a Comfortable Place To Gather

Think about the space where you will be leading your *Bible Quest* group. Ask yourself: Regardless of the size or location of my particular space, how can I divide it into a “work area” and a “story area”?

Hint: Define the story area by laying a small carpet or a blanket on the floor or by making a screen from a decorated appliance carton. If the learners are teens, you might establish a storytelling area by using old sofas or big cushions. If the learners are adults, choose the most comfortable setting in the church, such as the parlor. Avoid hard-back chairs in a circle or pews.

Another element that creates a sense of comfort is to hang posters or pictures on the wall at the eye level of the learners. Learners of all ages enjoy seeing their handiwork displayed. This also invites others in the congregation into your area and helps describe what your group is studying. However, set a time limit for artistic renderings to be on display.

A welcome sign outside the learning area says, “I’m eager to have you join our group. Please come in.” Greeting each person by name as he or she enters the area also says, “You’re important.”

Remove everything in the area that you are not using. You may be surprised by how much extra space will open up for use by your group.

If possible, keep the temperature at a comfortable level. Arrange the furniture in the room to allow maximum movement. Rearrange the furniture each time you significantly change the content of the session. The learners will soon recognize that as a sign that something new and exciting is about to happen.

If your age-group resources (Ages 3-4, Grades K-1, Grades 2-3, and Multi-Age [K-8]) include an Action Pack, the teaching pictures, and teaching figures, are intended to help create a welcoming learning environment.

## Provide Something To Eat

Food or beverages are at the very heart of hospitality and storytelling. We take a friend for coffee more because we are hungry for companionship, connection, and conversation than because we are thirsty for coffee. As you prepare your *Bible Quest* session, ask yourself: What food or beverage connects naturally and logically to the story we are hearing?

Hint: Many Bible stories suggest food or beverage. In the creation story, serve fruit and nuts-garden food. In the story of Abram and Sarai's beginning their journey, serve cheese and flatbread-traveling food. In the story of Joseph and the pharaoh, serve roasted grains, such as corn or sunflower seeds-stored food. As the Israelites wander in the desert, serve something that simulates the soft sweetness of manna, such as miniature marsh mallows.

It is not necessary to provide something to eat and drink every week, but food often adds to the story and is attractive and comfortable for people of all ages. Avoid high sugar content; stay with natural foods. Also be aware that the time your group meets may have implications for serving snacks. If your congregation provides a fellowship time at the end of the services, be aware that too much snack, even if it helps carry the story, is not good.

## Use Objects To Stimulate Storytelling

Imagine yourself entering the room of a friend or relative. You notice a new framed photo on the wall. "Oh, you have a new photo!" you exclaim and the person you are visiting begins to tell a story of the origin of the photo. As you prepare your *Bible Quest* session, ask yourself: How can objects stimulate storytelling?

Hint: Look to the story itself to provide a suggestion for objects to spark story interest. If you are telling the story of Jesus' calling the fishermen as disciples, cut brown wrapping paper in the shape of a boat and sit on the paper for story time. For adults, drape fishing net over a coffee table. If the session is based on Psalm 150 (make happy sounds for God), set out rhythm instruments or gather around the piano or organ for the story.

The age-level Leader's Guides provide guidance for using Action Pack items and other objects for storytelling.

## Send the Story Home

Make connections for the learner between the storytelling in the session and in worship and storytelling at home. Try these suggestions:

- Be sure the learners (Ages 3-4, Grades K-1, Grades 2-3) take home their story cards or leaflets (Multi-Age K-8). If a child is absent, mail or deliver the learner's resources.
- During the activity time, invite learners to create the same object that was used to stimulate storytelling at church. For instance, if decorated adhesive bandage strips were used as the storytelling object in the good Samaritan story~ provide extras and invite the learners to decorate them, take them home, and add them to their medicine chest. Each time they need a bandage, they will be reminded of the story.
- Create a home story journal. Record a title for the story and add reflections or questions about the story. Young children may draw pictures. Stimulate use of this journal by sending home with the

learners a sealed envelope. When they open the envelope at home, they will find a comment or question from you that may be taped into the journal.

- Create a story care box. Decorate a shoebox with ornate gold wrapping. At the end of each session, as the group gathers for “Celebrate the Story,” set an object of a copy or the story inside the box. Give this box to a different member of the group each week for safekeeping. Give the keeper-of-the-box a special blessing such as: “May the same God who guided Jacob and Esau to be reunited guide you this week and reunite you with someone who has been driven apart from you.” The box is then returned the following week to be passed on to another person.
- Invite one learner to prepare a surprise for the group for the following week. Give that person a copy of next week’s story. Ask him or her to read the story that day and to think about it throughout the week. Suggest that for the next session he or she bring either an object that relates to the story or food or beverages that seem to come naturally from the story.
- Invite learners to participate with you in locating outdoor settings for some of the stories. If a group member lives on a farm, he or she may offer to host a session in a pasture, where the parable of the lost sheep may be dramatically reenacted. Someone with a backyard pool may offer his or her home for a dramatization of the baptism of Jesus.
- Talk about day-to-day-connections between the story and what the learners experience on television or radio news or read in the newspaper. For instance, if you have focused on the story of the good Samaritan, ask people to watch for news stories of strangers helping people in distress. Share the stories on the following Sunday.
- Encourage a brief daily devotional time by modeling it at church. Light a candle and say, “The light of this candle reminds us that Jesus is like a light to the world.” Invite each member to do this once a day, at a family mealtime or privately, and to read part or of the story each day. Although this is a great deal of repetition there will be a new surprise each time, especially if only one verse is read or if emphasis is put on different aspects of the story You may assist by providing a sheet that reads like this:
  - Story of the Week: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-2, 11-32)
  - Monday: Imagine you are the son. Read the story.
  - Tuesday: Imagine you are the father. Read the story.
  - Wednesday: Pretend you are the older brother. Read the story.
  - Thursday: Imagine you are the mother of the prodigal son. R a e the story.
  - Friday: Before you read the story, imagine you are a servant who prepared the feast.
- Establish an intergenerational storyteller’s guild, Encourage story learners to practice a story at home and then present it to another guild member. Encourage a wide variety of storytelling techniques, such as drama and props, puppets of all kinds, or mime. Youth and adults may enjoy creating a drama or setting up a computer program based on the story.

*Bible Quest* provides a warm invitation to explore the pivotal stories that give us grounding and direction for our life journey.

Permission is granted to photocopy for use in a *Bible Quest* leader training event.

©1999 *Bible Quest* Publishers