

Yertle The Turtle

I. Background

Learners: Group of 10-12 elementary age children from the small congregation of a Presbyterian church who are meeting as one class for summer Sunday school

Setting: A Sunday school classroom in the Education Building

Time Frame: 55 minutes

II. Focus

Unit Subject Matter: Dr. Seuss books which are being used to teach biblical principles to the children. Each book will focus on a different theme.

Biblical Principal for this session: Christians have a solid foundation in Jesus Christ and the principles that he taught us to live by found in God's Word.

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

Session goals:

- Use Jenga blocks to explore strong and weak foundations
- Read and discuss the story of Yertle the Turtle
- Connect Yertle's foundation to the story of the wise man and the foolish man
- Create a decoupage rock paperweight

III. Space, set-up, and materials

Environment: A Sunday school classroom with floor space for children to listen to the story and one long table for the decoupage rock project which concludes the lesson.

Materials, Resources, Equipment:

- One bible for each child
- Book Yertle the Turtle
- 3 Jenga games
- One large rock per child
- Felt for each rock
- Watered down glue
- Cut squares of bright colored tissue paper
- Sponge paintbrushes
- Newspapers to cover the table
- Cut squares of white cardstock, one per child
- One large tongue depressor per child
- Markers
- Hot glue gun

IV. Step-by-Step Story Experience Plan

FEELING into the story (10 minutes)

- Group children into pairs and give each group some of the Jenga blocks.
- Ask each pair to build the tallest tower that they possibly can before it falls down.
- Observe children building and introduce the word “foundation” to discuss why some of the towers could be made taller than others.
- Tell the children that today we are going to hear a story about a turtle and his foundation

MEETING with the story (25 minutes)

- Read the story of Yertle the Turtle and use the following questions to discuss it.
- Why was Yertle unhappy at the beginning of the story? What happens each time Yertle asks more turtles to help make his throne? How does Yertle’s throne make him feel? How would you describe Mack? What words could describe Yertle? What does Yertle learn in this story?
- Link the weak foundation of Yertle’s throne to the bible story of The Wise Man and the Foolish Man
- Read Matthew 7:24-27 together. How can we as Christians have a strong foundation for our lives so that we are not like the foolish man who built his house on the rocks?

RESPONDING out of the story (20 minutes)

- Decoupage rock paperweights. Each child receives a large rock and a sponge paintbrush. Pie tins of watered down glue and tissue paper squares are placed on the long table. Each child chooses pieces of tissue paper to place on his/her rock to cover it. Use watered down glue to “paint” the paper onto the rocks. Make sure each child’s rock is completely covered with bright colored pages and that all edges are firmly glued down. Place rocks at one end of the table to dry.
- Children each receive one square of cardstock and a marker to write “I stand on the rock of God’s Word on their cardstock. Teacher will write for those who cannot do it themselves. Children will write their names on the back of their squares and leave them on the table.
- The rocks will need to dry beyond the hour of class time. After each is completely dried, the teacher will hot glue a tongue depressor to each rock. At the top of each tongue depressor, glue the cardstock with printed saying. Return completed projects during the next class time for children to take home.
- Close the session with a group prayer.

V. Rationale

Our society today tempts children and their families with many different “foundations” for their lives which do not include active participation in a church and engagement in God’s Word. Yertle the Turtle serves to illustrate that while foundations of our own creation may last a while, they ultimately cannot sustain us.

The opening activity using the Jenga blocks will give children the opportunity to arrive at their own conclusions about a strong foundation instead of the teacher simply telling them how to build the best tower. It is important for children to be able to arrive at their own understanding through experimentation instead of just being given a “head full of facts” by the teacher.

The book clearly illustrates the point of what happens when one does not have a firm foundation. By linking this story to scripture, the children will see how God’s Word is reflected in a children’s book.

I wanted the children to have a visible reminder of the strength that the bible gives us to live our daily lives. These decoupage rocks can be taken home and put in a place where the child will see it every day and be reminded that God’s Word is the only firm foundation that will always support us.