

How To Use This Book

This book contains seventy acts of worship, or religious observance as they are called in Scotland, for primary schools. For ease of reference, from now I shall call them assemblies. They are based on the Bible and will contribute to a wider programme of broadly Christian assemblies which in turn might be part of a school's overall assembly plan. The assemblies are grouped according to themes. Each can therefore be used either as an individual assembly in its own right, or as part of a series on one theme. For ease of use, each assembly takes one page of the book.

1) The structure of each page

Each page has a set structure to make it easy to follow and contains the following components.

The Biblical Material

This consists of a proverb or part of a proverb. The words of the Bible have been adapted for primary school pupils. Teachers can read the Biblical proverb as it is, or, if they feel it needs simplifying still further for infants, it is easy to do so as the quotation is so short. For example, a teacher might decide to change 'Seven things God does not tolerate,' (page 69) to, 'Seven things God does not like,' for infants. The Biblical material does not usually have to be read at the beginning of the assembly. I indicate in the text where to use it, or teachers can introduce it wherever they feel it is appropriate.

You will need

Any items needed for the assembly are listed under this heading. Many of these will need collecting together beforehand. This means the assemblies are not on the whole 'instant', though some of them are, but they will be participatory. Time can be saved by keeping basic items in an assembly box. Please refer to the section 'Assembly box' on page 11. Items such as speech bubbles can be made during the assembly itself to reduce the preparation required. Pupils can help to make the visual aids needed as part of their participation in the assembly; they can also bring in many of the items to cut down on teacher preparation.

If pupils are participating in making things or bringing things in, it is essential that all health and safety guidelines are adhered to.

Introduction

This introduces the main idea contained in the proverb. This section will often include activities in which the pupils can join. It always starts with something the pupils know as a way of creating a link between human experience and the religious idea in the proverb.

Core Material

This section is usually (though not always) the place where the Biblical material is read. It makes the link between the human experience and the religious material, interpreting that material in the light of the Christian tradition.

Prayer/Reflection

This section contains a prayer or reflection. It is important that pupils have the opportunity to worship or reflect on what has been said and done. Not all will take that opportunity but it is important they have the freedom to do so.

2) Introducing Prayers to Children

If a prayer is being said, it is important that the language used to introduce it is sensitive and gives pupils the choice of taking part at a variety of levels. It could be introduced with some of the following phrases:

'I am going to pray/say/read a Christian prayer. I would like you to sit quietly with your eyes closed and listen. If you wish, you can join in with the amen at the end. Amen means "I agree."'

'I am going to read a prayer which is very important to Christians. I would like you to sit quietly with your eyes closed and listen. If you wish, you can pray silently while the prayer is read, if not just listen quietly.'

An 'Amen' has not been added to the prayers. It is left up to the teacher how they wish to end the prayer or reflection.

It is important that the child has the choice of just listening or joining in silently. In county primary schools, with children from many different faith traditions and secular backgrounds, it is not always appropriate to have children joining in prayers. Schools with a Christian tradition and Church schools have a different basis and the above does not necessarily apply.

Some prayers are active - they involve the pupils in doing more than listening. Sometimes pupils create a 'prayer board' or read prayers themselves. In these cases, it is important that pupils who take part are chosen with care and sensitivity.

Throughout the prayers, God is addressed as 'Father', 'Lord' or 'God'. This is normal Christian practice, as these are specifically Christian prayers. If teachers wish to change the way in which God is addressed, it is advisable to select a title of God normally used by Christians as these are broadly Christian acts of worship.

3) Handling reflections

Some assemblies have reflections rather than prayers though some are combined with prayers. Usually in a reflection God is not addressed directly. Reflections enable a person to think deeply and ponder what they have heard. Many of the reflections have a focus or aid which can take many forms:

- an object such as a stone or candle
- a period of silence
- a piece of music
- a poem
- a picture
- a visual aid produced during the assembly

Creating an appropriate atmosphere is very important for successful reflections. Pupils should be encouraged to sit still and focus their attention. They will not necessarily find reflection easy and will usually need assistance. In particular it will help to provide something on which they can focus their attention.

If the focus is a poem, first introduce it and explain any hard or significant words rather than interrupt the reading. Then read it several times to bring out the meaning. It will help to give your pupils a task to focus their listening. An example follows:

'Listen to the way this poet thinks about anger. This poet imagines anger as a tree. If the anger is not dealt with, it grows. Listen carefully to the way he reacts to being angry, first with his friend, and then with his enemy.'

Another possible focus is an object. Here is an example, from page 52, of how a stone and a bowl of water could be used:

'The prophet Micah said this : "Who is as forgiving as God? He delights to show mercy and hurls our wrongs to the bottom of the ocean (Micah 7.18-19)." This tells us that God forgives: it is as if he puts people's sins at the bottom of the sea and puts up a NO FISHING sign. Hold up the NO FISHING sign. If you have a bowl of water and a stone, ask the children to look at the sign and then close their eyes and listen for the splash as the stone sinks. The splash is a reminder of God's forgiveness.'

Music and art can similarly be used to provide a focus for reflection. Again it helps to provide pupils with a task. Two examples follow:

'Look at Judas' cloak in the picture and concentrate on the way it surrounds Jesus. Jesus is surrounded by deceit. Look at the cloak while the prayer is read.'

'Listen carefully to the way the composer creates a peaceful feel. Think about the peace the disciples felt after the storm. Think of a time you have felt very peaceful.'

Reflections need bringing to a close. In a prayer, the 'Amen' tells you it is over. In a reflection, be careful to tell the children how it will end. It could end with a piece of music, a recognised sound such as a shaker or a

few notes on an instrument, a well-known prayer which acts as a summary, or with a form of words that will not spoil the atmosphere. For example:

‘We have listened to our story, we have imagined lies as a tree and imagined the axe of truth cutting it down. As we go about our daily work, let us take with us the thought that truth is stronger than lies.’

4) Creating your own style

Every teacher has their own style and the assemblies can be adapted to suit different delivery styles and various contexts. Material can be added or omitted, depending on time available.

5) Health and safety

As in any school activity, all materials and activities should be safe. Teachers are referred to their health and safety document.

6) Assembly box

Having an assembly box makes preparation quicker.

The following items should be in the box:

- Scissors.
- Thick felt-tipped pen.
- Sellotape.
- Glue stick.
- Sticky-Tack
(reusable adhesive that does not mark. This comes under various brand names).
- Paper
(various sizes, old pieces from display and scrap will do).
- A candle.
- Matches.
- A metal tray or old baking tin.
- A polythene bag containing sand.
- Some offcuts of card.

7) Single assemblies or themes

This book has been designed so that the assemblies in it can be used on their own or as part of a wider theme. They can be incorporated into a long term plan as part of an assembly programme.

8) Music

An index of music and a list of music books used can be found on pages 88-90. This index provides songs for each theme and indicates where a song applies to a particular assembly.

9) Photocopying

The illustrations in this book may be photocopied (single copies only) for use in the assembly. This permission extends to making one acetate for the overhead projector.

