

TEACHING NOTES

There are a variety of teaching tips scattered in the curriculum. Below is a compilation of all those suggestions that can heighten your effectiveness as a facilitator. Included are also the references back to the original lesson so you can see how some of these strategies were used. (Some of the strategies were used in multiple lessons with similar wording.)

Training Program

(Basic Training: Overview)

Give students a minute or two to consider the suggestions and to formulate a training plan for the coming week that will help them to develop the trait that they've chosen. They can submit this either on a cue card (as provided) or electronically (i.e. text, email, social media) to you, another student ministry volunteer, or a Christian mentor to create opportunities for following up during the week.

Use whatever method is most effective for your group (text, Twitter, Facebook, email, phone call, etc.) and be sure to follow any social media guidelines that may be in place for your church or ministry. Follow-up is critical to the effectiveness of this activity. Be sure to speak to leaders and mentors ahead of time to help prepare them to follow up with students about their spiritual training plans.

Side Coaching

(Basic Training: Spiritual Training Program)

(Basic Training- Bible Study)

While students are talking, float from group to group. Listen briefly, and if appropriate, add a small bit of information to help clarify an idea. Rather than answering questions

directly, try to lead students to answer their own questions, often by asking a simpler or clearer version of their question. Use this time to get a feel for the mood of the group, the degree to which they understand the material, and how engaged they are.

Note on Teaching Practice: Transitions

(Basic Training: Prayer)

This lesson moves students among groups a number of times, and is a great chance to practice your transitions. Research into educational practice shows that most misbehaviour occurs during transitions between activities, so if students know what to do before they move; they are more likely to be on task when they arrive. This is an important time to make sure materials are well-placed. Where possible, avoid forcing all students into one small location. Position yourself close to the action. It is also important to use the right sequence to transition from one activity to another. The following sequence is the most effective to get the right students doing what they should be doing, when they should be doing it.

Sequence:

1. When students are to move
2. What the students are to do
3. Who is to do it

Limited Prayer Experience

(Basic Training: Prayer)

Some students will have little or no personal experience with prayer. These students can be encouraged to join the group that most closely resembles what they think prayer might be like.

Once students have had a few minutes to share, ask them if there were any things members of their group shared in common. Give a moment for “think time” and take a few answers with the large group.

Mind Mapping

(Basic Training- Church)

Mind mapping is a technique that helps to visualize and organize ideas. A mind map is a diagram made using words or pictures arranged around a key word or idea. It is like a brainstorm on paper. It is important to use the visuals and words to inspire novel thinking. Students should be encouraged to draw lines between ideas that they think are connected, or to write linking words between two concepts. Students should also be encouraged to speak out loud while they are mapping. This “out loud” thinking encourages dialogue and discourse, which is important for learning. If students have never made a mind-map before, it can be useful to model mind-mapping. For this unit, as a group you could make a mind-map of “Spiritual Training”. Write the words in the middle of the page, perhaps draw a stick figure of a person lifting a barbell with a cross on it, and ask the student for words and images that would show “Spiritual Training”. Help them to make links among ideas, using “chain-like” lines for strongly linked ideas, arrows if one thing follows from another, etc.

Jigsaw Structure

(Q and Eh? Midrash)

A “jigsaw” is an instructional strategy that places a student into two groupings: a “home” group, and an “expert” group. The main idea is that each student in the group is accountable or responsible for “expertise” with information or skills needed for the entire “home” group to complete a task. Typically, students start with the home group to develop a sense of affiliation, responsibility and interdependence with their home group

members, move to the expert group to learn specific and different knowledge from other expert groups, and then return to the home group to share the expert knowledge with their other home group members, then ideally, to analyze or synthesize the relationships among the information shared by the experts. Three things are needed for a successful jigsaw: a clear means of placing students into two groupings, a clear expert group task that is different from the other expert group tasks; and that the expert knowledge, be required for the home group to complete a task.

Role on the Wall

(Q and Eh? Midrash)

One option to facilitate each expert's group discussion is to use "Role on the wall". Each group tapes a piece of chart paper to the wall. In the center of the paper, have the group write the name of the character they wish to understand better. Then students write words on the paper that they think represent the character's motives, back-story, knowledge, ideas and struggles. This can be a very rich and useful strategy for understanding many characters from the bible, although, because of the depth of thinking, it might take longer than "listing".

Circulation

(Q and Eh? Midrash)

During group work, it's good to circulate amongst the groups not to micromanage but to get a sense of their process and findings. Also, it's easier for students to ask for clarity.

Modelling

(Q and Eh? Midrash)

For some students, seeing a live demonstration of an activity helps them to understand the parameters of it. By walking through the activity (in this case, writing 1-2 questions you want to ask Jesus) and keeping that paper in your pocket provides a model for them to follow.

Isolate for the Few

(Q and Eh? Fundamental Question)

When trying to find out if any student has been missed, teachers will often ask “Does everyone have a partner?” or “Does everyone have a pencil”. The structure of this question is confusing and does not allow those without to answer, since putting up your hand suggests that you do have a partner or pencil. On top of that, you will not see the few people who have actually been missed. Instead, ask “Who does not have a partner?” or “Who does not have a pencil?” The question structure is clear and the few students who have been missed will be easy to spot. This is called “Isolating for the few”.

How to prepare a card-suit jigsaw

(Q and Eh? Jesus and the Skeptics)

The overall structure and idea behind the Jigsaw Instructional strategy is included in the first lesson of this unit, Q and A 1- Midrash. A good way to get students into their two different groups is by using playing cards. The cards have numbered ranks, and you can say “All the Aces, gather in this corner”, then later say “All clubs will study the crucifixion story in Matthew, all spades in Mark, all diamonds in Luke, and all hearts in John”. (You could also cut 4 pictures into 8 pieces each, and number the pieces from 1 to 8, asking students to gather in their picture groups or number groups. You can put a copy of the whole picture in the appropriate corner to facilitate kids finding their home groups).

The following procedure is important to get the right number of cards, and the right groupings. Students will eventually be using their cards to be in two different groups, depending on what part of the lesson you are in. The card suit will have them be in one group, the card's rank value will have them be in another. This lesson calls for only 3 groupings by suit, so you have removed the spades.

To make sure you have the right number of students in each ranked group, you must do the following. As mentioned above, arrange the cards by rank order. Once all students have arrived, count the number of students. Starting with the lowest rank, count the same number of cards, and set aside the higher ranks in case more students show up. Shuffle the cards and set them aside for later in the lesson.

Think/Pair/Share

(Q and Eh? Jesus and the Skeptics)

Think/Pair/Share is very simple structure with remarkable pedagogical underpinnings: almost every student will take a moment to answer your question since every student will be individually accountable to provide an answer to someone. It is important to allow students some time to process the question i.e. think time (perhaps around 30-60 seconds depending on how complex the question is, and how long they have been thinking about the material). By pairing up with a partner of their choice (or simply have them pair with someone beside them), students are able to participate and give their input without being "under the spotlight". On a scale of covert to overt answering, this is fairly covert. On a scale of perceived risk, responding to one person has relatively little risk. With this structure, you can have students rehearse their answer first, and then share with the larger group, moving both toward overt and higher risk answers. Alternatively have a student share his or her partner's answer. The second option encourages active listening in your students (something that is tough for everyone, but especially junior high students).

Think/pair/share also provides more introverted students with a voice. As leader, you can take volunteered answers randomly or select students you want to hear from. If Sanjay

(extrovert) and Sarah (introvert) are partners, you can ask “Sanjay, what did your partner say?” Encourage the sharing student to use their partner’s name when sharing (“Sarah said...”). If students have shared things of a more personal nature, always have them grant permission before their partner shares their answer with the larger group.

Being Present

(Q and Eh? Jesus Cries)

(Following Jesus in the Day to Day: Healthy Interactions)

It is possible that some students will be emotional, depending on personal history. They may need space to process their feelings. Depending on the student, you can show support simply by being nearby. Position yourself to one side of the student (not in front), and be present. You don’t have to say a word, instead your presence is a sign to them that, if they need it at that moment, they can lean on you (figuratively or literally). You should be aware and cautious of your church’s policy on such situations. Make sure you are familiar with your church’s child protection policy in terms of appropriate contact and how to deal with disclosures of abuse or other harm-related incidents. Also plan with your leaders ahead of time how as a team you will respond to delicate situations. For example, it’s advisable to have female leaders approach female students (male leaders with male students). In these moments when the Holy Spirit may expose some wounds, there may be some tough issues to deal with. Use your best discernment and proceed prayerfully.

Don’t Keep Secrets

(Q and Eh? Jesus Cries)

In most Canadian jurisdictions, there are laws regarding when, how and what types of incidents require a report to the authorities (these are likely covered by your church’s child protection policy). As a leadership team, you should all know how to handle such

incidents based on your child protection policy. When very sensitive issues arise, there may be “red flags” to alert you. e.g. “Can you keep a secret?” It is advisable not to promise to keep a secret, since in many cases you are required by law to report what you have heard. Instead, reassure the student you are willing to walk through whatever issue they need to deal with, and you may need to involve others in helping that process. A possible response may be, “Whatever you would like to share, I want to help you as best as possible. That may involve me bringing someone else in to help with the situation. I want you to know that no matter what happens I’m willing to walk with you on this.”

Testing New Technology

(Q and Eh? Journey Continues)

Technology can help enhance an experience or become a hindrance when they don’t work as expected. If possible, test any new technological arrangements (e.g. with the text message option above) in a mock run of the lesson to ensure as many glitches can be handled ahead of time. Also be prepared with a “plan B” if it doesn’t work.

Different Paces

(Q and Eh? Journey Continues)

Students work at different paces. Some will finish their assignment faster than others. It’s best to judge the time allowed based on those who require more time. (If time is limited, then you can provide “3 minutes left” prompts at each segment for groups still not finished e.g. while groups are walking around and need to return to the original room.) For others who have completed the task faster, have a leader begin some debrief with them by asking questions bringing more depth/clarity to their answers. (You may want to play “devil’s advocate” to bring other perspectives into their thinking.)

When all the groups have completed the activity, have them gather together. Have

students compare their sequence to the one you're about to present (one at a time). Award the group(s) whose answers are similar to the presented sequence.

Ask students which of those four presented statements they identify with the most. When they've made their decision, they can indicate which statement they identify with by holding up that many fingers up (e.g. 1 finger for statement #1, etc.).

Wait Time and Questions

(Person of Jesus: Christ Follower)

Students need time to consider answers to questions. The amount of time is dependent on two things: The amount of academic engaged time (did they read for thirty seconds or thirty minutes?); the complexity of thinking (is this a knowledge level question, or one that requires analysis?); and the movement from cover to overt (did you have them write their answer down first, share it with a friend first, or will they share it with the group right away?). The more the academic engaged time, the higher the level of thinking, and the more overt the answer, the longer the amount of wait time required. In part, this has to do with grappling with bigger ideas, and in part it has to do with risk. Sharing with a partner before sharing in the whole group can be an effective way to overcome this. After asking a question teachers typically feel like an eternity has gone by, when only a few seconds have passed, while students often need more time to think of an answer. As a leader, try counting to thirty before panicking.

Keeping Students on Task

(Person of Jesus: The Trinity and Jesus)

The great pedagogy teacher Barry Bennett said teachers should FLAB and STAB, or Float like a Butterfly, Sting like A Bee. This means to walk among your students, paying attention to what is going on, and being available for questions, but addressing any misbehaviour the instant you see it. When students are working in groups, some kids will

tend to goof off, some will be on task, and others will be too self-absorbed to allow anyone else to speak. This is pretty normal. As you walk among the groups, gently listen beside a group, and if one student seems to be hogging the spotlight, ask a quieter student if they would add anything, or say something different. Deal with any misbehaviour quietly or invisibly and encourage the students to invite everyone's ideas.

Dietary Limitations

(Person of Jesus: Jesus the Servant)

Be considerate of any dietary / allergy restrictions in your group. Perhaps you can use yogurt if a student has allergies to food colouring. Use rice pudding if students cannot, or will not, eat gelatin (some vegetarians avoid gelatin).

Tangential Questions

(Person of Jesus: Jesus the Servant)

These questions are designed to spark conversation and are not to limit where the discussion may go. Allow students to ask their own questions as they process this story. Take a few minutes back together as a larger group to hear people from each perspective volunteer answers to each question, or to add insights or questions of their own. When there are differences between the two perspectives, try to consider the reasons behind those differences.

Buffering Potentially Loaded Questions

(Message of Jesus: Who Do You Say I Am?)

The last question may feel a little loaded for small groups if there isn't a leader involved with the students. If you feel it would be helpful to your group, have students transition

from the small groups they are in, to pairs. By pairing with someone they are comfortable with, they may feel more open to share their answers aloud.

Present Leaders Even During Independent Work

(Message of Jesus: Who Do You Say I Am?)

Ensure that your leaders are still very present for the Breathe In activity. Just because students are working independently shouldn't mean that your leaders remove themselves. Encourage leaders to interact with students and nudge them along without being a distraction. If students need a helping hand, encourage leaders to buddy up with students and ask prompting questions around how to write a prayer. Simple suggestions like: "What do you want to say to God? What do you want to ask God about being lead by Jesus? What do you want to understand better?"

Make Your Rounds

(Message of Jesus: The Core Teaching of Jesus)

While students are reading the passages, make rounds. Help them answer the question of what is the love portion and what is the law portion. Be sure they have a clear understanding of what this means. Continue to make your rounds and encourage their painting. Note to students how love is other-centred.

Students Being Silly

Following Jesus in the Day- Day- Self Image and Self Perception

Students could be silly at this point for two main reasons. The first is to avoid awkward moments, possibly if they are not 100% comfortable with the way they look or feel about themselves. The second is because this is a mature subject and they are still developing in

their maturity. If there are any rambunctious or silly youth in your group, you may want to challenge students to be mature for this portion of the activity.

Social Identities

(Following Jesus in the Day to Day: Stereotypes)

Some students in your youth group may be starting to experiment with new social identities and may be experiencing bullying or name-calling based on stereotypes. Please be aware of this, as students could get emotional as they answer the question, or listen to other people's answers.

Grouping Students

(Following Jesus in the Day to Day: Healthy Interactions)

Putting students in groups is often taken for granted, and many teachers default to always allowing students to choose their own groups. This is convenient in some ways; however, some students are subtly ostracized in such groupings. Other times troublesome students will cluster together in one group. Ideally, sometimes students choose their own groups, other times you can use a chance procedure, and still other times you will want to deliberately determine how the groups are formed so that you can include students of differing cognitive, social and spiritual abilities in one group. It is also useful to break down barriers between students who might not associate outside of youth group. Sadly, many students feel isolated, even at youth group. This lesson includes a grouping strategy that allows students with leadership skills, isolates and "regular" kids to both choose their own group, and for you the leader to provide a structure that will be supportive and nurturing.