

SPRING 1977

Following a suggestion made in the January delegates' meeting this year, this issue marks a departure in content and format for the Clearing House. It is devoted to one theme: aspects of teaching in the third grade. To this idea many schools responded generously, as is evidenced by the contributions which follow.

If you think this new tack is one that should be pursued, please let your delegates to the June conference know, for I shall try to get a sampling of opinion there. I would also appreciate suggestions for the next issue - another class to survey, or a particular subject throughout the grades?

- Anne Charles
Editor

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THE THIRD GRADE

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ON THIRD GRADERS....

I found the children very interested in the origins of things. We took the various objects in the classroom, the contents of their lunch bags, clothes, desks, and then tried to trace back where these things came from. In all cases they came back to something that had grown upon the earth. Then the question arose from the children: "And what about the earth?" That's where the Bible stories came in.

The Bible stories and the lessons in practical living of the third grade represent a transition. Children at this age are coming to the end of an epoch. They are emerging from early childhood and getting ready for childhood proper, which is represented by the intermediate grades of the elementary school. Fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades will be a foreshadowing of adolescence, just as the primary grades were an echo of pre-school babyhood.

The stories from the Old Testament - Genesis, in particular - are remarkably suited to lead the child from 'Paradise' to earthly life, or from his inward union with the world to a more outward relation to it through observation and study and work. There is first of all the story of the Garden of Eden and Adam's expulsion from it. Then there are the portraits of great human individuals who carry responsibility and face moral decisions: Jacob, Joseph, Abraham, Moses, Solomon, and David.

The creation story is one which passes ordinary understanding. Careful reading will show this fact. The teacher who realizes it will not yield to the temptation to treat the creation in too logical a manner, but will rather read it as it stands, perhaps having the children memorize at least the first portion of it, and thus placing it into the children's memory as a strange treasure that will lead only very much later to understanding. The children found the Bible stories completely satisfying, especially the story of creation. They did not question or analyze but took it quite literally. We painted scenes as they imagined them from each day of creation and memorized portions from the King James version of the Bible.

I found the third grade children in a condition analogous to our pioneers in this country. They liked to discover and find new ways of doing things and to imagine themselves in very primitive conditions. From this point of view, I read them the story of a boy in the Rockies, who with a young Indian boy managed to exist through a winter in the mountains although reduced to no clothing, no shelter, no food, no anything. They were able to find and make all the things they needed. This was the sort of practical life that appealed to the children. They liked to imagine what it would be like to have nothing and then to start in.

Practical life was the theme which ran all through this year. But practical life to these young children meant that they were of this world and this world was something which was given as a gift to us. Out of this gift we could domesticate, civilize, improve,

even manufacture things, but all the raw materials, everything we had to work with, was really given to us as a gift. A sense of appreciation was what I tried to work for in pointing out the sources of all things. I tried to make the children conscious of the weather and the nuances of weather, what it means to farmers or cattle raisers and not just to people who may be inconvenienced with their picnics or little excursions.

We went back to the primitive Indian dwellings in this country and showed the different sorts of houses that were made with bark, mud or sticks, or with clay and adobe, as well as the wigwams on the plains. This was connected with our second grade fables of Indians and brought the fables down to a more concrete and practical view. We made small models of many types of primitive houses.

In farming, I stressed the importance of grains around the world, and that most of our important foods have come from some form of grass - the rice of the Far East, the corn in America, and the wheat in Europe. We talked a great deal about soil and how it could be preserved and enriched instead of being allowed to leach away or deteriorate through poor farming. The children came to feel very sympathetic toward the earth and its soil. They learned of the importance of cows, earthworms, humus, of how to build a compost pile. It was at this time that many of the children in the class decided to become farmers. Laura Ingall Wilder's Farmer Boy was read aloud.

In arithmetic, the theme of practical life was carried out with more emphasis on weights and measures; we tried to develop the ability to estimate distances, measurements, and volume. Liquid measure practiced at the sink became a favorite occupation.

In handwork, we tried to weave a piece of cloth, to make a dish by modelling clay and firing it, to make bread in the classroom, and really to go back to the essentials of life in every way to see how things were made. In projects on housing or farming I stressed always the fact that the earth is our mother and provides all that we need according to the geographical position that we are in upon earth. The difference in housing in the South, in the North, in the tropical regions of the earth, or in the Far West and Far East - all were contrasted so that a beginning in geography was made, from the point of view of climate and earth conditions.

The only reader the whole class used together was the Golden Bible*. In this reading together in turns, I let the good readers do most of the oral reading and was content if the poor readers could keep the place. The good readers thus made the stories interesting and lively for all the children, and the poor readers had their chance for practice with another simpler reader at another time of the day.

Our most ambitious class dramatization was of the story of Joseph, as we read it in the regular Bible. We took large portions of our text from the Bible and improvised the play in class. Later we put it on for an assembly.

- Carol Gardner
Class Teacher, ex officio
Garden City

* out of print

OLD TESTAMENT STORIES

I introduced the Old Testament work with some main lessons in which we painted each day of creation as it was told. Each main lesson included a child's recapitulation of the previous day's "day", a new "day" which was then worked out in watercolor by the children, and the writing of the "day" of two days before. Painting in main lesson was something new for me and for the children, and I found the work wonderfully harmonizing. Diana Bell in Vancouver has done a lot of work on this very subject, and I owe my inspiration to her.

- Sam Glaze, Grade 3
Highland Hall

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We learned by heart the first day of creation in English, German, and Hebrew.

- John Barnes, Grade 3
Hawthorne Valley

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From the beginning of the fall term to Michaelmas we painted just about every morning. This was done in order to create the mood and enter into an artistic experience of the Creation according to Genesis. We learned the first day of creation by heart, and also did it in eurythmy. I read the account of the other days out of the Bible to the children. Throughout this two week period I told the children stories from Jakob Streit's And There Was Light. On Michaelmas we painted a picture of St. Michael, and the next day I told of the fall of Adam. This lauded us into the Bible stories, which I then continued throughout the rest of grade 3, taking the last 15 minutes of every main lesson for this.

- Mel Belenson, Grade 4
Toronto

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From the teacher, then through choral speaking, then with individuals speaking, the days of creation were recited, culminating in a speech presentation for the Michaelmas assembly of the first four days of creation, followed by this verse in star pattern:

God with all commanding might
Filled the new made world with light.
He the golden tressed sun
All day caused his course to run.
And the moon to shine by night
With her spangled sisters bright.

After speaking or telling a part of the story, we went to the painting room to make the spoken words visible. Only painting was used until Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise. We wrote and read the days of creation verbatim. After that, Bible stories retold and written by the class in their own words. We continued these stories until Christmas, ending with the birth of Moses. Many times, in simple style, we dramatized the stories, using simple costumes.

- Margaret O'Brien, Grade 4
Detroit

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OLD TESTAMENT - BIBLIOGRAPHY (compiled from all contributors)

The Bible, King James version

Primeval History }
Moses and His Epoch } Emil Bock
Kings and Prophets }

Genesis, R. Steiner

And There was Light, J. Streit

Animals of the Bible, D.P. Lathrop

Stories from the Bible, Walter de la Mare

In the Beginning, Sholem Asch

Heroes of the Bible, Manuel Komroff

Elijah the Slave, I.B. Singer

Flower of the Holy Land, B.S. Vester

Songs Along the Way, E. Allstrom

The Ark of Noah, J.L. Wilson

Legends of the Bible, L. Ginzberg

Studies in the Old Testament, V. Tomberg

Deeper Secrets of Human History in the Light of the Gospel
of St. Matthew, R. Steiner

Story of the Bible, Hurlbut

Story Bible, Pearl Buck

PRACTICAL LIFE - HOUSING

The third major area of study, done in three segments of about four weeks each, was devoted to practical life, which I have called Living on the Earth. We began by connecting this with the story of the fall of Adam. Adam, now living upon the earth, had to look for three things: food, shelter, and clothing. We began with shelter; we discovered that our own first home is our body, and that the earth is the home of all mankind. We learned the following poem by Clifford Monks of Highland Hall:

The earth is the home of all men,
Its ceiling the blue sky above.
Its floor is the ground on which we walk
Upheld by a selfless love.
The sun warms our home in the daytime,
The moon and the stars by night,
And over it all with great wisdom
God rules with a lawful might.

And out of this home, with heaven's help,
From water, fire, air and earth,
Is fashioned a house for each soul
To dwell in from time of birth.
The heart is the sun which warms man's house
The stars are the light in his mind,
And when in his deeds there is warmth and light
Then God finds a home in mankind.

We also learned the song, The Sun is in My Heart, by A.C. Harwood. Then we took an imaginary journey around the world and saw how people live in different places, climates, and cultures. We were able to visit a preserved pioneer house here in Toronto and discover how people lived some generations ago. We then moved into modern times in North America with descriptions of modern types of housing. We also made use of pictures, blueprints, and other artifacts. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit a building site, but we did have a real construction foreman visit us with lots of tools and a first-hand description of house building.

We mixed cement and concrete. One parent built a workbench for our classroom and many donated tools, so that each child was able to work on his own project, a bird feeder in the shape of a little house. With a smaller class one could have the children work on a common project like a dollhouse for the kindergarten. We finished the block with a description of the different trades needed in housebuilding - architect, plumber, etc/- and the children were assigned to describe or locate things about their own house: what kind of siding, how the house is heated, find the furnace and ducts.

- Mel Belenson
Toronto