

ART ~ AND ~ CRAFT

LOOKING AT ART

- **Old - And Not So Old - Masters**
Post cards, posters and books provide plenty of reproductions. Look at those that have a strong feeling to them – joy, anger, peace etc – and discuss with the children how the feeling is created. Consider subject matter, colour, and style. Get the children to copy some (they do it at school!) then use the skills they have learned when composing their own expressive art work.
- **Icons**
Painting an icon is a spiritual activity and requires extensive spiritual preparation, including prayer. Look at some icons with children and use a simple book to help you explore the basic conventions of symbolic colour and subject matter. Get the children to discuss what they would like to make a special picture of and why. Plan the symbolism they will use and spend some still, prayerful moments in preparation before beginning to paint. Try painting in silence, or with some meditative music playing.
- **Decorated Writing**
Otherwise known as ‘illuminated script’. This was another spiritual, prayerful activity. Look at some examples and discuss with the children the reasons for wanting to make writing this beautiful – the sense of the beauty and importance of scripture. Get the children to pick a passage of scripture or prayer which they feel is particularly important (perhaps provide a few to choose from) and again have some quiet reflection before beginning to create a decorated version (it doesn’t have to be in traditional ‘monastic’ mode, of course). Quiet, and reflective music might be appropriate as they work.
- **Stained Glass**
Do you have any in your church? Does anyone ever look at it? Spend some time with the children looking at the way key moments or features of a Bible story have been selected for the windows. Ask the children to think about a Bible story you are using in your group and decide what are the important moments for them – what would they put into a stained glass window? There are various ways of reproducing stained glass effect – you can even buy glass painting kits.

CRAFT IDEAS

- **Banners**
This is a favourite activity, and there are many techniques. Whatever technique is used, and however large or small the end product, don't forget the importance of the planning before you start. It is in discussing what images you are going to use and why, that the spiritual element of the activity can come in – don't lose it!
- **Frieze**
A frieze can be a bit like a cartoon strip and gives the opportunity to express a narrative in a visual way. Talk through the key moments of a Biblical (or other) story with the children – what are the 'highs' and 'lows'? How are the characters feeling and why? How would you feel in their situation?
- **Collage**
This gives the opportunity to look at some novel materials for art work! Discuss with the children what would be appropriate materials for a given subject – this will help get to the heart of a subject or issue. Using everyday materials – eg pasta in a harvest picture – gives the opportunity of remembering that the everyday things of life can be used in a spiritual context.
- **Montage**
Using images and words from everyday life again brings 'the world' into a spiritual context. Pictures and headlines from magazines could be used to make a display for a prayer focus – either petition or celebration/thanksgiving. Powerful images can be created eg an image of 'The Body of Christ' could be made from photographs of young and old and all races, pasted inside the outline of a body.
- **Mobiles**
Reflection on sky, sea and space can be enhanced by using mobiles. The vastness of the universe God has created is hard to come to grips with. The children could make a scale mobile of each different planet with its moons and maybe some spacecraft orbiting it. They could then do some research as to how far apart the mobiles would have to be hung to get the scale of distances right: eg if we hung our model of Earth here in our meeting room, our Pluto mobile would have to be hung in Gemma's bedroom three streets away!
- **Models**
Models and scenes can be used for dramatic play. They can also be used as a response to a story, and designing them can help the children focus on what are the important elements/characters in the story for them and why.

Making a house is a favourite modelling activity – whilst making their model, children could think about what makes a house into a home, or what is meant by a text such as: 'If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builders is useless' (Psalm 127:1 GNB)

Making a frame for a picture, another old favourite, can be given a spiritual dimension by concentrating on the subject to be framed and trying to express in the decoration of the frame, something about why that person or thing is special. The process and the end product can be thanksgivings to God.

- **Special Boxes**

There are many ways to make special boxes. As with the wrapping paper, these can help celebrate someone who will receive the gift, or they can give an opportunity to think about the gift which will go inside: perhaps it could be a piece of paper with a special message – what will the message be and why? Alternatively, the box could be for something precious to the child who is making it – what is the precious thing going to be? Why is it precious? Could it be a picture or description of someone, a verse of scripture or a favourite prayer?

- **Design Projects**

Designing anything needs a lot of discussion about why you've chosen to do things in the way you have – when the thing you are designing has religious significance, the possibilities open up for spiritual reflection. After reading relevant Old Testament passages, the children could design their own Temple, priestly vestments or Ark of the Covenant: what would be the significance of all the things they have put in their designs? Alternatively, they could design a modern church building, church furniture or vestments. This would entail looking at what the church currently uses, and reflecting on its meaning, as well as discussing the children's own designs.

Techniques

- **Potato Prints and Card Stencils**

These can be used to make personalised wrapping paper for a gift for someone special on a special occasion. Designing and making the paper can help focus on the qualities of the person who will receive the gift and the children can be led to see the activity as a thanksgiving to God for their loved one.

- **'Body Art'**

Techniques such as using finger, hand and footprints or drawing round children's outlines then decorating the results can be used to enhance children's sense of their own worth and importance both to God and the worshipping community.

- **Observation**

Observational drawing of nature and natural objects – eg leaves, flowers, stones, rocks, crystals, shells – calls for great concentration on the thing being drawn. This can be given a spiritual dimension if the children are encouraged to see what they are looking at as God's work. Using magnifying glasses can increase the impact of God's amazing creation. Using techniques such as tree rubbings and leaf prints can also help children appreciate and celebrate what God has made.

- **Colour Matching**
There is an area of the Isle of Man called 'The Plains of Heaven' where artists used to go because, it was claimed, every possible shade of green could be found there. If children are asked to try and match the colour of different leaves, barks, stones, sands, soils they will soon see how varied creation is, and that saying 'the grass is green' is hardly an adequate description! Matching skin colour will also show that there are vast varieties of browns and pinks even on one individual's body – categorising someone as simply 'black' or 'white' is, again, a travesty of God's varied creation.
- **Scraping**
Make some 'rainbow paper' with colour washes or scribbling with coloured pencil crayons, then cover the whole sheet with black wax crayon. Create a picture by scraping away the wax to reveal rainbow lines. This technique could be used to help children reflect on a variety of themes connected to the way God brings light out of darkness.
- **Wax Resist**
A variant of the above is to draw a candle or other image on white paper or card with yellow or white crayon, or with a white candle, then to paint over the image in dark blue or black water colour. The 'light' will shine through the 'darkness' and the children can be led to reflect on the things which, like the wax, cannot be covered over and destroyed by the unhappy things in life.

Subjects

- **Fire**
Images of this symbol of the Spirit can be created by splattering thick paint, or by blowing watery paint across the paper. The children could be led to reflect on the warm colour range we use and the characteristics of flames in relation to the Spirit.
- **The Universe**
Small holes in black paper held to the light can lead to thinking about the vastness of the universe, where every pin prick of light is a sun as big as ours. Observational recreations of the Earth as seen from space with all its glowing colours and swirling clouds – not at all like a school room globe – can lead to a consideration of the beautiful planet God has given us to live on.
- **Environment**
Looking at, and recreating the different environments of the world – mountain, jungle, forest and moorland – adds to an appreciation of the variety of creation; contrasts between fertile and desert regions can lead to reflection on ecological issues; reproducing camouflage patterns could introduce discussion of the way God has designed a creation which is dynamic - ever changing and adapting.

- **Changes**
Can you see a tree from your meeting room? Why not get the children to do observational drawings of it every month throughout the year - or it could be photographed from a fixed point every month. Use the results as a way of reflecting on the place of seasons, change, ageing and death in God's creation. The children could look at photographs of an older adult at various stages in their life and try to draw them.

- **Portraits**
It is easy to get hung up about being representational when making portraits. Look at some 'non-representational' portraits such as those by Picasso. Ask the children to wonder about the characters of the people he was painting – how do the images give us a feel for a character? The children could think about what was important and special to God in their own character, or the character of a friend and make a portrait that is designed to show *character* rather than to 'look like' the subject.

The children could investigate expressions and create exaggerated masks portraying various emotions in relation to characters and key moments in a story. They could put a 'negative emotion' mask/image next to a 'positive' one and reflect on what would have to happen to move the person from the negative to the positive (see Drama).

- **Seeing**
Look at things through coloured filters or cellophane, or reflected in a distorting surface such as a spoon, and record the results. Discuss the way that things look different from different points of view and how things may look different to God from the way they do to us.

Looking for shapes in natural forms that make us think of something else; using rubbings or prints from nature and turning them into something else (eg a face or a fantastic creature); or looking at carvings which have been made from pieces of twisted branch can all promote an appreciation of the way we each see things differently - and that using our imaginations can open up new possibilities and new worlds beneath the surface of things.

Many of the above ideas have been adapted from material in the following:

'Called To Lead – Unit Three', National Christian Education Council 1990
'Here's One I Made Earlier', Kathryn Copsey, Scripture Union 1995
'100 Bible Craft Ideas For Children', Sue Price, Kingsway 1998
'The Looking and Touching, Asking and Learning for Drawing and Painting Book', Manchester Education Committee 1976