

Teacher Tips: Some Teaching/Learning Ideas

by Diana Hynson

Teaching plans in your lesson don't excite you? Planning the study time all by yourself without curriculum and need fresh ideas? Find that you go to the same type of activity too often and that your students are tired of it? Check out this handy list of teaching activities! Most are suitable for teens and older.

Teaching/Learning Techniques

Students learn in a variety of ways, and even the best lesson needs to be adapted for a particular group. If an activity doesn't seem to be working for you, consider substituting one of the following. Some are active; some are more passive. Many of the sit-down activities could be acted out or used as cooperative or competitive games to make them more active. Be sure to have a balance between moving and sitting; between thinking and feeling; between hearing and responding. Pay attention to various ways of learning: visual, verbal, physical, musical, logical, interpersonal, and independent.

Appreciative inquiry (may work best with older youth or adults): When assessing or analyzing or evaluating something (an event, a particular circumstance, a consequence of some conflict . . .) we tend to focus on what is wrong or what needs to be fixed or improved. Appreciative inquiry focuses on what is — or used to be — good. It can be used to discuss a current issue or a biblical one; and you can also use imagination. For example, Judas betrayed Jesus, but not at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. What do we know (or might we imagine) about Judas that we can appreciate? How can that appreciation (rather than later criticism) be formative, or at least informative, in considering disciple-making?

Balloon messages: Draw or imagine a "balloon" (such as those a comic book uses for conversation) over the head of a character in your story, in the Bible, or in some other situation. Ask students to fill in the dialogue. Then use their responses as discussion starters.

Banners: Banners can be made from shelf paper, unfolded grocery bags, wrapping paper, butcher paper, computer paper, or other types of paper. Decorate the banner using anything that gives color — markers, crayons, pencils, or stickers would work. Banners can praise, announce, question, or debate values, news, opinions, information, accomplishments, and events. Use the banner to highlight or to open discussion about whatever is on the banner.

Be ambassadors: Imagine that your students are ambassadors from a place that you describe and are going to another place that you will describe. Create a scene that allows for creative tension and various values. Then ask the ambassadors to play their roles in dialogue with others from other origins. Have them keep in mind both their origins and their destinations. (For example: an ambassador from an impoverished nation meets with the people of a more economically stable nation over the issue of equitable food distribution.) This works well when several ambassadors must negotiate.

Book report: Read something and report back. This works best for good readers and/or older youth.

Brainstorm: Collect ideas, opinions, attitudes, or information about a subject in the lesson. Do not discuss them at that time, but note them for prioritization and development later. Everyone's idea gets written down. You can also brainstorm by going around the group in an orderly, rather than random, style, preferably making the circuit more than once.

Building Blocks — Giving directions: Distribute two identical sets of children's building blocks. Distribute about ten or twelve pieces in a variety of shapes, one set to each of two volunteers. The pair sits back to back. *Person One* will build something from the blocks and give instructions to *Person Two* about how to build the same thing. *Person Two* remains silent. In a second round, different volunteers also sit back to back, but *Person Two* may ask for clarification. Examine the differences in communication and giving directions when people have experience and can be in dialogue.

Bulletin board: Use bulletin boards to display students' work, posters, art, or other projects that enhance the lesson material. Creative bulletin boards are colorful, eye-catching, informative, and reinforce the information and concepts of the lessons.

Bumper stickers: Use bumper stickers you have seen or ones you make up. What do the stickers say about the values of the possessor? Students can imagine the entire personality of someone who has a bumper sticker; then they can use that profile to discuss stereotypes, assumptions, impressions, and the consequences of those ideas. Students can make bumper stickers themselves.

Buzz session: Drop a hot topic in a small group and let the opinions fly. Debrief afterward.

Captioning pictures: Gather pictures from magazines or newspapers or anywhere else. Have students write captions for them, or have them create dialogue that is relevant to the lesson. Use this activity to bring Bible and life together.

Case study: Describe an open-ended situation that is relevant to the issues, needs, concerns, or questions of the students. Use the case to open discussion about how students would deal with or respond to the people in the case.

Challenging assumptions: During discussion time, declare a time to review information shared. Identify the assumptions that underlie the comments and ideas held or proposed. Challenge as many assumptions as you can identify or the ones that seem to have the greatest impact on the issue at hand. What new insights or opportunities become available when you are not limited by assumptions? One process for doing this assumption check is the "five levels of 'why?'" When the first-level reason for holding a particular position or assumption is mentioned, do not stop with that reason. Ask "why?" (What is the rationale for the first-level reason?) Ask that "why" question four or five times, and you are most likely to get to the root value underlying the assumption.

Charades: Using only silent signals such as gestures, facial expressions, word clues (sounds like . . .), and so on, students have to guess a relevant phrase, expression, title, or event from the lesson.

Charts: Charts can be used or overused for just about anything, so be sure that graphs, lists, and charts are the best way to gather and visualize your information.

Choral speaking: Teens may not get too excited about speaking or reading together, but if the drama is fun and relevant to the Bible as well as to the age group, speaking in crowd scenes will work.

Collage: Many media can be used to make a collage. The most typical are newspaper headlines, pictures cut from various publications, slides, and advertisements. The collage can present concepts that are similar or dissimilar. In either case, use the composite artwork to discuss values, opinions, and experiences. Whenever possible, let students make their own collages.

Come and see: Take abstractions and bring them to life. Use a parable or other situation, look at the story, establish the dynamic equivalent of that situation in today's culture, and have a first-hand experience yourself. Then debrief.

Compare/contrast: Set up opposites, using any means — print, art, drama, case study, or other — to look at more than one side of an issue or event. The more personally involved the students are, the better.

Cultural relativity: Each culture or social system values certain attitudes, beliefs, processes, and hierarchies. The differences provide for fruitful discussion. One way to challenge assumptions is to ask, "Do you have to . . . to . . .?" (For example, "Do you have to be smart to go to college [or vice versa]?" or "Do you have to be a certain race or ethnic group to get a good job?")

Dance: Dance stimulates personal creativity, uses physical energy, and allows for a means of artistic expression that does not always translate verbally.

Danger or opportunity: Look for alternative views and possibilities in different situations by playing "That's Good; No, That's Bad" with at least two players. The second one is the "straight man" [person?] for the first player, giving a positive, "Oh, that's good" to the affirmative statements or the reverse, "Oh, that's bad" to the negative comments of the first player. Be creative — even outrageous — so you can push your thinking to more critical levels and issues. Note the example below.

Player 1: "I finally got those concert tickets I've been hoping for."

Player 2: "Oh, that's good."

Player 1: "No, that's bad because I already spent the money I had saved for the tickets, and I'll have to borrow the money."

Player 2: "Oh, that's bad."

Player 1: "No, that's good, because now I'll be motivated to look for that part-time job."

Player 2: "Oh, that's good."

Player 1: "No, that's bad because I'll probably have to give up my weekends."

Player 2: "Oh, that's bad . . ."

This is a starting place for discernment and understanding how one arrives at a decision.

Debate: Allow two teams some time to prepare the pro and con sides of a controversial issue. Then have them square off. Give time for debaters and observers to debrief. An alternate activity is mediation. Instead of focusing on the polarity (pro or con has to win), assign one or two others as mediators who work to identify agreements, points of commonality, places at which agreement can be reached. This can be used to assess how a "both-and" approach or a win-win can be achieved.

Decision games: Forced-choice exercises are a beginning level of decision making. A next level involves cases or situations that are open-ended and that require a decision. When decisions are made, examine the possible consequences of one decision over another and the impact those consequences can make.

Decorating the room: Decorations can set the tone for certain festive times, and they can enliven a season or event (such as birthdays or graduation) in the lives of the students or of the church. Decorations also reveal some of the inner self of those who decorate. Try dressing up the room occasionally to see what the students reveal about themselves.

Demonstrations: Ask a guest to visit and to demonstrate how to do something relative to the lesson. Be sure to have an opportunity for hands-on involvement by the students if at all possible. We learn better when we can get our own hands in the mix.

Discussion: Discussion should be focused on the relevant issues of the lesson. Take time to allow for necessary digressions, and do not have the entire route planned; but have a goal in mind and aim for it. Be sure everyone who wants to contribute can and that no one (especially the leader) monopolizes the conversation. It is neither necessary nor desirable that the leader comment on every contribution.

Evaluation of an event or experience: Also called debriefing, evaluating allows students time to think about their feelings, reflect on what happened, consider the consequences, review the meaning from other points of view, and explore learnings and "unlearnings."

Experience and change session: Provide an opportunity to experience — not just read or hear about — something that can change behavior, attitudes, impressions, assumptions, or information about anything. The experience might be on a trip, with a visitor, or in a new social situation. The key is that the experience provides a new, firsthand way to think, behave, or feel.

Field trip: Go somewhere that brings added insight to the lesson material. Visits to other places of worship make popular Sunday school or confirmation trips. Debrief afterward.

Fish bowl: Have a few students sit or stand in the center of the other students, who observe silently the action or discussion of the center group. At the conclusion of the fish-bowl activity, participants and observers debrief what they did and saw.

Forum discussion: Everyone's contributions get equal hearing. You might even bring the soap box for students to stand on. You could assign various issues or attitudes in the lesson to make up a forum discussion.

Greatest single event: Choose your own parameters — your lifetime, a series of events, a historical era, a given story. What is of primary importance and why? What implications does that event have for you, your community, nation, world, your faith, others' faith?

Group discussion: A group discussion can be done in several ways.

1. General council: Each person has the floor and can speak or pass in turn. Others listen without interruption.
2. Random council: Order of speaking is random, but everyone gets a chance before people can speak a second time.
3. By recognition: The group leader recognizes who will speak, but there is no mandated order or balance for who speaks when.
4. Free for all: like most church meetings!

Group work: Small-group work promotes more intimacy and sharing and often makes a task less intimidating and more inviting, especially when the assignment is difficult. Junior highs may feel better, for example, about a Bible study exercise if they know they have partners.

Guided imagery: A scene is created and students are helped by a guide to imagine themselves in it. The guide presents a word picture aloud, pausing often to give students the chance to see in their mind's eye where and how they are being involved in the imaginary setting. Participants should be comfortable and free from distraction. Often soft music helps create a meditative mood. Do not be surprised if someone dozes off if the meditation takes a few minutes or more. Be careful about the subject matter, since you can never completely know how students' conscious or unconscious thoughts will involve them. Be sure to debrief afterward.

Hero, victim, fool: Present a list of names that students will know, especially past and present people of note (or notoriety). Ask students to identify each person as a hero, a victim, or a fool and to explain why they have designated the people as such. Have the students vote on each person's status, and discuss the reactions. If votes are unanimous, there is fertile ground for discussing and examining common ideas, which may be stereotypes or myths that need exploration. Naturally, you do not name anyone who could be hurt by the process.

How many of you: This is a good icebreaker, but it also helps introduce people, new information about people, new insights gained about the perspectives, values, habits, perceptions, and abilities of different people. This can be used as an opinion poll on two levels. First, to explore an overt issue, such as: "How many of you favor capital punishment?" The second level asks about the values, assumptions, and so on that have an impact on that issue; for example, "How many of you value human life above all else?" "How many believe the punishment should fit the crime?" "How many think prison should rehabilitate?"

How much of what you know? Much of what we "know" is not true, or it goes out of date before we update our mental files. Use this activity to challenge commonly held knowledge and to examine other data.

I care, but I can't help: Develop realistic and rational goals where none seem possible. Use this activity to present the big issues, such as hunger or peace, that concern your students but in which they feel helpless to operate. Many issues are too big for an individual to comprehend, much less tackle; but there is always something that can be done. Brainstorm all the barriers and reachable steps; then analyze them. Look for smaller or more local goals that would support the larger ones. Then develop an action plan to accomplish the goals.

Ideal endings: Use an open-ended story such as a parable or a case study. Ask students to write, dramatize, or tell about what they think the ideal ending would be, given the principles in the lesson. Then compare their ideal endings to probable or possible endings. Analyze and discuss the differences and similarities.

Identify with characters: Students can often see themselves in Bible stories or other stories. Give them the opportunity to verbalize or to act out how they think they would feel or act in the situation that a story character faced. Students may have a hard time imagining themselves in the position of someone much older or younger. Even if there is not a person in a biblical story the same age as the student, the student can imagine how the situation would affect someone of his or her age. For example, a teenager might relate to Miriam in the story of the infant Moses in the Nile. There is no obviously older adult in the story, but an older adult might imagine how the situation would affect someone whose grandchildren and adult daughter were in potential danger.

Illustrating: Students can use their imagination to draw, paint, finger paint, or depict in another medium the events in a story or situation. Students may think they are too old for crayons, but even adults can have a good time once they get into it. Provide protection for clothing if the art project is messy.

Improvisational drama: Have students act out a story or situation with little or no preparation. Let them "go with the flow" of their immediate experience of and reaction to the story. Improvisation can allow for spontaneity and the expression of feelings. Actors and audience debrief afterward.

Inspirational stories: Share stories of heroes or of "ordinary" people who have been able to accomplish extraordinary things. People who model the Christian faith provide great stories. People who have immediate connection to the experience or history of the students are usually the best source. Do not assume that youth know about prominent people who lived before the 1970's.

Interpreting pictures: Mount pictures on construction paper or in a collage. Ask students to choose pictures that they think express a particular attitude or situation. (For example: choose a picture of someone who looks upset and imagine what caused him or her to be upset; or choose a picture of something that suggests wealth and analyze why the picture would make that suggestion.) The pictures should support the possible interpretations in the lesson.

Interviewing: Students can interview a guest who brings a particular expertise relevant to the lesson, other students who have experiences to share, or people who assume the part of someone in the lesson, such as Jesus and the woman at the well. Be sure you have a list of focused interview questions, which could be formulated by the students or prepared beforehand.

Lecture: Lecture is the least interactive of all teaching techniques, but it is the quickest way to relate information. Be sure to use colorful word pictures, anecdotes, and examples. Keep good eye contact, posture, diction, and vocal inflection. Avoid reading an entire lecture, long statistics, and long verbal paragraphs. Stop often and ask for feedback and questions.

Make a mock budget: Ask students to work with real or imaginary situations with imaginary money. Have them assign percentages of a total budget (even if you have no dollar amount) and set priorities for spending. Use this activity to reveal and discuss priorities and values. For example, students could imagine that they are state comptrollers who recommend percentages of the state budget to state employees, schools, service agencies, public utilities, trash removal, and protection personnel, such as police. How was the money divided and why? Be sure to relate those values to the ones in the lesson.

Make an action plan: Identify a common goal, outline the barriers and the possibilities, analyze how to overcome weaknesses and to maximize strengths, plot a course of action, and develop a means of evaluation. Then do it! Be sure to evaluate later.

Map making: This is useful in Bible study activities, especially when the distances involved have important implications for the story. Use maps to plot the journeys of Paul and Abraham, the people sent into exile, or Jesus and the disciples. Be sure to have a source that provides a legend for distances and for terrain.

Memorizing: There are ways other than rote memorization to reinforce information in a student's memory, but memorizing Scripture can be a life-saving and life-giving practice. If not all students have Bibles, memorization may be particularly important. Scriptures that are both understood and memorized will come to mind time and again to provide a faith foundation for life issues and situations. (Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring to remembrance all that he had taught to the disciples, and this is one way the Spirit can work!) If you work on a memorization activity, use creative memory games to make it more fun and effective. Association games usually work well. (For example: F A C E —I a word to remember the musical notes on the spaces of the staff). Association with repetition works even better when it is fun, as in inventories of places or characteristics in alphabetical order. (I'm an apostle and I'm going to Antioch. I'm an apostle and I'm going to Antioch and Bethesda . . .")

Mime: Mime is different from charades in that mime acts out, in silence, an event or scene as a whole. Observers will guess or discover what the event is.

Montage: Students can make a picture using other pictures related to a particular theme, pasting them together in close proximity or superimposing them over one another.

Movie making: Camera-recorders and VCRs are often available for students to act out, record, and play back their own dramas, newscasts, or other enactments of scenes and situations from the lesson. The playback should be used for discussion of feelings, events, and learnings as well as for fun.

Murals: Use newsprint, butcher paper, long computer paper, or shelf paper for students to illustrate something. Murals can reinforce or depict a life chart, a whole story in scenes from the Bible, an event significant to class members, a historical timeline, or another long-term event.

Music: Sing or read lyrics; and examine them for their stated or implied values, their assessment of the culture, their witness to the faith, and their appropriateness to the age of the audience. Use hymns and various forms of contemporary music. Put Scriptures or faith statements to other tunes, raps, or rhythms that are familiar or to original compositions. (This is what the Wesley brothers did — "Why let the devil have all the familiar tunes?")

Newscast: Information can be presented as if it is a segment of broadcast news. Students interview and are interviewed in scenes from the Bible or other times in history. Be sure you have a list of suggested interview questions that focus on the content of the lesson. Interviewees also need access to the information they are being interviewed about. Always set the stage before an interview unless it is meant to be entirely spontaneous.

Newspaper articles: Articles from daily news can be analyzed for their connection to biblical teaching. How does the world look today? How does it stack up in terms of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, for example? Students can examine modern values and events in light of biblical witness.

Object lessons: A story that has a moral or one that is open-ended but points to an obvious conclusion can illustrate for students the consequences of certain attitudes or behaviors. Many parables and biblical stories can be used as object lessons (such as the parable of the pearl of great price), but many have such open endings we can only guess (as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.)

Ok, not ok: Explore multiple perspectives. One person makes a statement; everyone else indicates if the statement is *ok* or *not ok*. Later discuss why each person held his or her opinion. Look at the values and assumptions. Some examples:

- A married man with a family is convicted a second time for drunk driving. He has his conviction overturned and keeps his license because he needs the car for work.
- A church-run day care center provides a discount for people of that denomination, regardless of whether the clients are members of that local church, but others pay the full tuition.
- A person with a physical or social handicap wants to participate in a particular ministry.

Opinion polling and surveys: Opinion polling can be used to survey any group to which your class has access, including themselves. Polls can be as simple as Agree-Disagree, with some range of variance between the poles; or as complicated as people can make them. Be sure that questions can be answered clearly by choosing the options you give. Questions should be as free from bias as possible and should be stated in such a way that no particular correct answer is implied. Students can use polls as discussion starters for various theological issues that emerge from their lesson.

Panel discussion: Panel members can be class members or guests to the class. The issue they discuss can be any hot topic, a situation Jesus or other biblical figures faced, a case study, or other theme. Each panel member should have a different perspective or set of experiences so that the panel covers several points of view for the same subject.

Personal stories: A class of ten students could have hundreds of years of total experience. Many of their experiences will be similar, yet unique. Since every person has a story to tell, sharing those stories can be very valuable for others who face the same issues, decisions, and circumstances. People need to hear success stories and need models who demonstrate the faith. Naturally, personal stories should be shared voluntarily in a climate of trust and confidentiality.

Place name games: What did Dela ware? She wore her New Jersey. Iran into a Turkey and Iraq'd my bumper. Bethla hem'd my slacks. Best to say them aloud. Get it? Places and persons in the Bible were often named for significant events. (Use a Bible dictionary to look up the meaning of the names of all the people in the story of Ruth, for example.) Students can choose names for a fictional new church, event, or person, for example, and explain why those names have meaning.

Planning with class and class leader: Students are likely to have a higher investment in the class if they have a part in the planning. Of course, that means that the class leader will take more time to prepare and to plan ahead.

Playing games: Just about anything can be made into a game, and many games can be adapted to help illustrate a biblical story or event. The games that require movement are sometimes a must during a lesson for teens and children.

Posing (human frieze/mosaic): Students are asked to strike a pose to demonstrate how they think they or someone else would be feeling or behaving in a particular situation. For example, read a Bible story about the trial of Jesus. As students mill around during the reading, stop occasionally and have students strike a pose to show how they think Jesus, Peter, Pilate, or some other character was feeling or behaving. Take time to debrief.

Position statement: Students consider their response to a particular issue after doing Bible study, hearing a panel of experts, or doing other investigation. Then they write or state their position. Divergent views are then discussed. Or students can write or state their position before and after doing research. The ensuing discussion centers on new learnings and shifts in position.

Posters: Use posters for decoration, to display information, to collect information, to collect relevant graffiti, to list responses to questions, or to showcase whatever you want in plain view. Colorful posters are usually better.

Puppetry: Puppets can be made from paper, cardboard, papier mache, cloth, socks, wood, or whatever else your imagination will allow. Puppets tell the story or act out the event, which can be scripted or impromptu. Use the action to discuss learnings, new ideas, or different values.

Puzzlements: Why is north "up" and south "down"? Using that same reasoning, is heaven in the north and "the other place" in the south? Students have intriguing questions that are often puzzlements. Take time to think them through. What do the puzzlements say about impressions, assumptions, values, stereotypes, and "facts"?

Question and answer: Question and answer is often the activity that follows other learning activities. There are basically three types of questions: personal, analytical, and informational. Personal questions ask for the students' reactions, feelings, opinions, or reflections. Analytical questions ask for the students' thinking and evaluation. Informational questions ask for particular data, the right answer. Personal and analytical questions will fuel a discussion because they cannot be answered with just one response or a yes or no.

Quizzing: Quizzes are good for review, but are not always a welcome activity. The leader's response to students' answers should be as affirmative as possible. A response to a wrong answer might better be stated, "You're partly right. Can you add more?" or "That wasn't quite what I had in mind. Can you think of another...?" or "That's a good try. Does anyone else have an idea?" Quizzing in the Sunday school class should not be graded, ranked, or competitive in a way that separates students from one another or that defines them differently.

Quotes: Collect or invent quotes. What do they tell about a theme, issue, values, the person who coined the quote, assumptions about the hearers, expectations of the hearers, and so on?

Radio show: You can "broadcast live" stories from the Bible, personal interviews, on-the-spot reporting, or whatever you choose. The show can be scripted or spontaneous, but it should be focused on the lesson.

Readers' Theater: Students will read something — a play, Bible story, or narrative — in character, using only their voices and minimal gestures to portray their parts. The difference between readers' theater and drama is that readers' theater relies heavily on the use of the voice, not on acting. The dynamic presentation is in vocal tone, volume, inflection, and expression. Props, costuming, and make-up are not used or are used very sparingly. After the reader' theater, discuss reactions, insights, new perceptions, and ideas generated by this medium of expression.

Recall an event: When classmates have had a joint experience or similar experiences, recalling the event and the students' responses to the experience can be quite illuminating. Use that opportunity to discuss divergent feelings, thoughts, impressions, learnings, and whatever changes in behavior or values resulted from the event. What else did the experience evoke? What faith issues surfaced?

Research: Many students may be unfamiliar with the tools for Bible research. Using the Bible to do research is not always enough. Introduce the class to commentaries, Bible dictionaries, concordances, and other reference materials. Learning to use reference material should have a point, and it can also be fun. For example, write on the chalkboard several place names and words from the Bible — Salem, Ebenezer, Jerusalem, Shalom, Mt. Zion, Meribah, and so on. Tell the class that they are charter members of a new church seeking to name that church. Then have them use reference materials to look up the words so they can make a decision. When the research is complete, each charter member presents his or her case for the name he or she has chosen.

Resource people: Resource people will probably be guests to the class who are invited because of a particular area of expertise relevant to the lesson. Have pertinent questions prepared or in the thinking stage before the guest arrives.

Rituals: You can create your own rituals or look into the rituals individuals already practice. Ritual is not confined to Sunday morning liturgy, but extends to the traditions regularly practiced at home, at church, in school, and elsewhere. For example, ask students how their families celebrate Christmas or Thanksgiving. Is there any particular ceremony, plan, or outline of events for the way students participate in Homecoming? How do your church members handle the annual church supper? Examine what you do, how the pattern evolved into a ritual; and what values, assumptions, expectations, and learning you gain from the ritual.

Role play: Students take the role of characters in a story, case, Bible event, or other situation that you describe. They act out what they think and feel those characters would have done or what they would think or feel in the same circumstance. Debrief afterward.

Role reversal: The role reversal is similar to a role play, except that roles are played by persons opposite to what they normally would do. Males take the female point of view; teens and parents swap agendas; professionals and unskilled workers take each other's place; religious conservatives and liberals exchange places. What insights, biases, learnings come to the fore?

Round table discussion: An issue, situation, or theme is brought before everyone for discussion. Each participant has the opportunity in turn to contribute to the discussion.

Sacraments and sacramentals: Sacraments are symbols and symbolic actions that reveal God's grace and a means to experience grace. They are instituted by Jesus Christ. United Methodists observe baptism and Communion as sacraments. They are properly observed in the context of worship, but they offer valuable teachable moments. What do the elements symbolize? What is the meaning for the individual and the community of faith? What understanding do you gain from or about God after participating in a sacrament?

Sacramentals are sacred moments that can reveal grace, love, and spiritual joy, but they are not considered sacraments. Marriages, funerals, graduations, retreats, rites of passage, and other such events often have a spiritual dimension. What do you learn about yourself, your church, your community, and your family when you share in sacramental occasions?

Scavenger hunt: Students work individually or in teams to find as many things on a list as they can in the allotted time. The hunt can be through the Bible, through the lesson, or through some designated location such as the church or the neighborhood. Students need something purposeful to look for. A variation of the scavenger hunt works well for a confirmation activity. Officers of the church wear a name tag that illustrates their position (such as a hammer or deed for a trustee). Students have a list of the signs to look for, then interview the officer to discover what that position entails and to get acquainted with the person who holds the office.

Scrapbook: Students keep a collection of memorabilia or create tokens of remembrance on a particular theme or issue. Updating and looking at the scrapbook periodically is a good review. A scrapbook may work well for projects that the class sponsors, such as missions projects or other outreach activities. Sharing the visual reminder with others can work well to promote the activities in other groups.

See-Judge-Act: Consider Scripture and life experiences. First, see: What is the current reality? What is the situation as it presently appears to be? Second, judge: What Scriptures have relevance to that reality? (Be careful about selecting only what is convenient or supportive if other Scriptures have a different view.) Third, act: If you take seriously the teaching of the Scripture, how will that affect the current reality? Will something have to change? If so, how and why?

Sensory experience: Learning and retention of that learning is most lasting when students involve more than just their intellect. If students can have some stimulation of the senses, their learning is enhanced. For example, eating and smelling fresh-baked bread is more memorable and more fun than just telling about the bread

prepared for the Passover.

Sentence completion: Students finish the thought, action, or dialogue themselves. The content can come from Bible stories, personal stories, quizzes, surveys, or elsewhere. The parables lend themselves well because so many of them are open-ended already. Divergent ideas from the completion exercise should be discussed.

Show, tell, share: Students will occasionally have possessions or experiences relevant to the lesson. Give them the opportunity to be "resident experts." Student involvement increases attention and learning.

Simulation: Simulation is the second of three levels of learning. Lecture or cognitive learning is the least involving and therefore the least lasting. Simulation retains the cognitive learning, but it moves toward the affective or experiential level. In simulation, students create or re-create what could be an actual encounter, then debrief afterward. For example, discussing the story of the wedding at Cana is cognitive. Simulating or acting out a Jewish wedding is more affective. Attending a Jewish wedding is experiential and is the most effective learning activity of the three.

Singing: Take time to think about and discuss the lyrics of songs. What do you know about the circumstances of the song writer? What occasion, thought, or circumstances inspired a particular hymn or song? How has the music or lyrics served the community? the faith community?

Skits: Make up your own drama or use one already prepared. Students act out the parts and discuss afterward their new or changed learnings about the characters, the issues, the values, or the theological insight.

Slides and films: With cameras and video capabilities so easily available to many, you can make your own slides and films. Slides and films give visual reinforcement to print materials. Viewing slides from the Holy Land, rather than just looking at a map, can really make the story come alive.

Soapbox: Do you have an opinion you want aired? Step up on the soapbox and grab an audience. Students have an open opportunity to voice their thoughts. Of course, anyone has access to the box, so be prepared for disagreement! Discuss varying viewpoints. (Be good, and don't fight!)

Someday . . . : Dream of the future. Help students dream of the future—theirs or others.' You may want to set the context for this idea by having students think about the present and past. Then, with or without a given set of circumstances, have them look to the future. Another variation is to imagine the future if certain events or conditions are not present.

Storytelling: Everyone has a personal story to tell. Storytelling can include the students' stories, stories from the lesson, stories from the Bible, or stories from other experiences and situations. Stories give life to cognitive perceptions, ideas, and principles.

Tape recording: Students can record conversations, dramas, readers' theaters, or anything they wish. Tapes are fun to play back just to hear how people sound, but they can also be used to take messages to people who are homebound or who are away from the church or class. Music tapes can provide background for some other learning activity, especially another art form, such as dance or drama.

Teaching: Give students the chance to be the teacher. If you intend that the student teach a whole class or a significant part of a class, you will want to work in advance to be sure the student is prepared. However, asking a student to be the impromptu teacher can be effective, too. In that case, you would give the student some prepared discussion questions, a case study to lead, or something that gives him or her a starting place. Be sure to talk with the student what it is like to be on "the other side of the desk." What insights did the student gain from leading rather than following? What difficulties or benefits did he or she encounter?

Temperature check: Use a "temperature check" to test how things are going. It's good for group building. Everyone is urged to comment in one of five ways: (1) appreciation, (2) new information, (3) hopes and wishes, (4) concerns with recommendations, or (5) puzzlements (which may or may not have an answer). The various categories air various viewpoints other than just concerns or complaints. This activity also helps change the direction of the lesson if the teacher finds it isn't working.

Text comparisons: Using different Bibles, compare how the same passages are alike or different. Does the wording change the implied or stated message? Does a change in punctuation emphasize one idea over another? Do the words used carry different connotations from one version to another? What does this exercise teach about biblical interpretation?

Then and now study: Sometimes teachers take for granted that students know how something used to be in the past without considering that the students' past is a shorter span of years. Comparing how Grandma did things with how younger students do things can also be quite illuminating. In Bible study, the comparison would be between how life was in ancient days versus the present. The significance of many biblical stories is enhanced when students realize the differences in time and mode of travel, terrain, climate, social customs, religious observances, family structure, importance of church or synagogue, and so on. For example, examine Ruth's situation as a widow and compare her situation with that of a widow today. Consider issues such as life insurance, inheritance of property, the possibility of holding a good job, opportunities for child care. Would Ruth have had any such opportunities? Would she now? What does the comparison tell about the biblical time and about our world today?

There is no excuse: But there may be a reason. Examine how students or biblical figures acted in a given time and place, especially if that action seemed inappropriate. Examine how you wait in those situations in which there is no excuse for the delay. What new possibilities come alive if waiting time is spent productively instead of in fretting?

Timeline: Timelines show the flow of events in whatever historical or developmental period you choose. The timeline can be of a biblical period (the line of kings from David to Josiah, for example), or it could consist of the events of a student's life from birth to the present. The timeline can also relate changes in attitude or development.

Tracing ripples: A stone dropped in still water sends out ripples. Stories dropped in students' minds send ripples of thoughts and possibilities for insight. To trace ripples:

1. Brainstorm everything you know about an event, parable, and so on.
2. Paraphrase into a summary consensus statement what you "know."
3. Assign work groups to explore different facts or points of view. Collect "soft" data — opinions, reactions, feelings — about what happened in the story or event.
4. Use your imagination to carry the ripple to the realm of "what might be" if certain behaviors continue, opinions or perceptions remain the same, or alternatives come to mind.
5. Develop a hypothesis and evaluate conclusions at each level of change.

You can also do a flow chart of possible courses or outcomes, illustrate the events, make a strategic action plan, or other illustrative exercise to highlight the five steps.

Transparency making: Some transparencies can be made on copy machines if the film is compatible with the machinery. Such transparencies can be of pictures, maps, or anything that can be photocopied. You can make your own transparencies using markers, crayons, or wax pencils. Transparencies can be used to tell a story, to provide supporting information to a report, or to display written or visual data for any other reason.

Travel letter: Write or read a letter (or trip diary) of any trip, real or imagined. Students can use their imaginations and the Book of Acts to prepare Paul's trip diary, for example. Pay attention to details such as landmarks, distances traveled, people visited, reasons for traveling, means of travel, the length of stay, and traveling companions.

Trigger words — meaning versus intent: Some words "pull our triggers" or set off a mental explosion, sometimes when none was intended. Look at trigger words in personal anecdotes, biblical stories, or other experiences. What was intended? What was perceived? What was the result? What was learned about the situation or the inherent values? For example: "inner city" is a term most would use to describe the downtown residential area of a city. To others, the term "inner city" seems to be an indictment, meaning "poor, ignorant, and uncultured."

TV show: Act out your own TV show. The format could be a situation comedy, documentary, mystery, or game show. The content is handled accordingly. You might do a Bible quiz in a game-show format, for example.

Wire sculpture: Make wire sculptures of religious symbols or story characters and use them to help tell a story or to illustrate a lesson.

Wisdom of the Ages: Imagine yourself in the presence of a person (dead or alive) who is considered wise, or heroic, or expert, or prominent for some good reason. What might that sage tell you in a given circumstance? How might that person have felt, believed, and behaved? What values might that person suggest or embody? What would Jesus do or advise you to do?

Word association: Word associations are often thought of in the context of counseling or therapy, but they can get at images outside that context. Use any appropriate list of words, religious terms, characteristics, colors, activities, or others. One person says the word. Others respond with the first word or image that comes to mind. Examine the connections. What do they say about impressions, values, beliefs, or behaviors?

Word scramble: Logical learners like puzzles and patterns. Scramble the letters of person and place names, of concepts or key words in a Scripture reading or lesson. Have students unscramble the word and then indicate its significance and relevance to faith and life.

World according to . . . : Choose your own measure — a magazine (*TIME*, *Seventeen*, *Rolling Stone*, *American Rifleman*), Bible, group bylaws or unspoken expectation, or other. What is the worldview presented by that measure? (The measure doesn't have to be media. It could be personal, such as businessperson, homeless person, person with a handicapping condition, and so on.) What does your agreement or disagreement with that perspective say about you and your faith?

Worship: The Bible teaches us to give thanks in all circumstances, which means that any teaching or learning event can also be an occasion for worship. Bring prayer and faith commitment to the teaching context. Students can offer sentence prayers, create litanies, read Scripture, write or state faith affirmations, offer confession, and commit themselves to some form of ministry.

Write a biography: Who is the main character being studied? Have students write what they know and can research about that figure. Then have them share the biographies for a composite report.

Write a letter to yourself and mail it later: Writing to oneself can be a great reminder of commitments made, decisions pondered, or events attended. Someone other than the letter writer should mail the letters at some distant date, known or unknown to the writer. The letter then becomes the student's own "reality check." (Did the student do what was promised in the letter?)

Write a personal faith statement: Students can think theologically at any age. To say, "Jesus loves me, this I know" is a faith statement. What do students think and believe about God? about Jesus Christ? Writing sometimes helps the writer confront and clarify what he or she thinks and believes.

Write a surprise ending: Parables are great stories because so many are open-ended. Write the ending to any story; then compare notes. What did students envision? How are they alike and different? What do those comparisons reveal?

Write ads: Students formulate their own advertisements for anything (for disciples, for missionaries, for membership in some group, or for products). Examine the qualifications they expect and what they say about people and about the product.

Write dialogue: Students write a conversation on a particular topic or event. Look at who says what, and why. What is happening? How is it perceived and revealed in the dialogue?

Write headlines: "Hot topics" are best for headline writing. The students are encouraged to be concise in stating an issue or event in a single headline. How is the topic perceived? How is it condensed? What is the significant part chosen for the headline and what is its relative importance in the total picture?

Write over articles: Anything can be rewritten to help think in new ways about the content. A Scripture verse, comment, or anything can be paraphrased or rephrased, using standard grammar or some "fun" dialect, provided that it is not meant or perceived as a put down to another race, culture, or group. How has the meaning changed or become clearer? What new way can you think about an "old" subject?

Write poetry or stories: Encourage students to be creative on paper. Stories and poetry can be about anything — the lesson, a Scripture verse, an experience, a feeling, or a belief.