

Bible Games : What Value do They Have in Teaching ?

“What did you do in Sunday School today?” Jim and Susie’s mother ask. Jim wished she didn’t always have to ask. After all what is there to do in Sunday School? Except sit?

“Nuthin” Jim answered, “The teacher just talked about some temple or something.”

“We played a game in my class!” Susie interrupted. “We got to pop balloons with secret messages in them!”

“Games!, in Sunday School?” “But, what did you learn?” Mother asked.

“Oh we learned about God’s temple, David wanted to build it, but God told Solomon, David’s son to build it, because he was a man of peace. The temple was all covered in gold, and the teacher said that our bodies are temples, too. Because the Holy Spirit lives in us, if we’ve trusted Jesus.”

All week long mother thought about Jim and Susie. There was such a difference in their attitudes toward Sunday School, and though they had both studied about Solomon’s Temple, Susie had learned and remembered all the important facts, where as Jim just remembered that the lesson was about “a temple or something.”

Games in Sunday School? Games to teach the bible? Maybe Susie’s teacher didn’t have such a bad idea after all. Games in class certainly stirred Susie’s interest.

There are at least six ways games can be used to aid teaching in the Sunday School or other children’s Bible classes:

First, games generate excitement and break monotony. A child who knows there will be something new and exciting in Sunday School, eagerly anticipates going.

Even a word game generates interest in children. Ask any group if they would rather hear a bible lesson or play a bible game, the content may be the same but you can be sure the answer won’t!

Second, games can be used to disguise teaching and make it fun. When teaching a Bible verse I often start quoting then stop and point to a child who must recall the next word in the verse. I could announce this procedure by saying “Now let’s have a test to see if you were listening.” I would probably hear moans from everywhere, defenses would go up, and some children would become nervous, or frightened. But, if I announce “Now let’s play a game,” the children would cheer, the atmosphere would be far more relaxed and if a child missed a word, they would feel far less dejected because it’s only a game. Yet the game would be a method of teaching using repetition and recall.

When teaching a longer memory portion, I once made up a game which had two matching triangles for every verse. The first part of the verse went on one triangle, the second went on a matching triangle. The class divided in to two groups and took turns choosing triangles, and trying to find the matching triangle with the rest of the verse on it. I used this each week as a unit project, and the children became so familiar with the verses that they were able to memorize the passage after repeating it only a few times. They had been learning the verses every Sunday before class, but had enjoyed it because they had been disguised as a game.

Also, games can encourage attentiveness. When I substitute teach in the public schools, I often tell a visualized version of George Washington Carver’s life. Carver was a Christian so the story has the spiritual values I want to emphasize. In order to encourage attentiveness, I tell the children we will play a quiz game after the story. This usually quiets even the rowdiest of them, and they hang on each word and make a mental note of each detail. Then I let them break balloons, or open plastic eggs with quiz questions in them. Or on the spur of the moment I may pit the boys against the girls in a game of tick tack toe, or hangman.

Games can also aid memory. Children remember vividly what they are exposed to through games, since their concentration is increased their minds are open, and expectant. Sometimes I print a series of blanks for each letter, to show a new Bible verse. The children guess what letter goes in the spaces. If they guess a letter that is not in the verse, it gets marked off the list of letters. They try to guess the verse before a specified number of letters get marked off. This aids memory because it forces them to really look at and think about the verse, and to shout each word. It provokes what memory expert Jerry Lucas calls “initial awareness” the basis of all memorization.

Games are especially adaptive to review. How can we train children to retain main facts, and ideas of previous lessons? Recall them often through an exciting game.

A child evangelism teacher told me once of her “lollipop tree.” She inserts lollipops into a styrofoam base. She then calls upon children to recite verses or to answer a review question, those who answer get to choose a lollipop from the tree. Two of the lollipops are colored on the bottom of the stick, and the children who choose the special lollipops get to choose another one. The children are very anxious to try, hoping that they will choose one of the special lollipops.

Another simple game I learned from the same worker I have used myself with great success. The materials needed are twelve or more circles with flannel backs, and one larger circle with antennae eyes, and a big grin. Each child who answers a question, or recites a verse correctly gets to place one circle on the board, the circles are placed so that they touch each other and when I add my circle, the face, it forms a worm. The children love the surprise of seeing the worm formed for the first time, but they also like to name it a silly name, and form it every week, this is very adaptive.

Bible games recognize and reward diligence and attentiveness. Yet the teacher can introduce some questions easy enough for any student, be sure to call on a certain child that time, so that they have a chance to answer.

Games aren't just for fun. They can also generate excitement and break monotony, disguise teaching and make it fun, encourage attentiveness, force initial awareness, and make the frequent recall of facts enjoyable. Games reward diligence, and attentiveness, and let every child feel successful.

Games should not take the place of carefully prepared lessons, but they can be used with such lessons to make Bible classes more enjoyable and more profitable. Perhaps bible games belong in your class. What do you think?