

G.I.F.T. Time:

A fun-filled way to experience (and understand) the stories of the Bible

Our Sunday program for kids JK through grade 7 is an exciting time for everyone who participates. We call it our "G.I.F.T. Time" as we are **G**rowing **I**n **F**aith **T**ogether – the reason for this special time. We have an hour together, and we take every minute we have and fill it with stories and experiences to shape faith and make everyone hungry for more. This all happened when we introduced the "Workshop Rotation Model".

And what a gift it is for all involved! There were doubters when we made the changes, but once we started, we knew we had something special. This resource is to share with you what we did so you can consider what you can do in your local situation.

G.I.F.T. Time is a happening place while we open our Bibles and experience the Word. We begin with Gathering Time where we play, sing and pray, and are lead in an activity related to our story. Always fun and fast-paced, you never know what to expect. One day the room is transformed into a kid-size game board and another it's filled with rainbows, or another we are "Bubblin' Over" with water, bubbles, and music. Always something meaningful and memorable. We finish with our G.I.F.T. Time Prayer and then it's off to workshops in age-based groups.

Workshops are based on an approach called the "Workshop Rotation Model". If you aren't familiar with the "Workshop Rotation Model" for Sunday School, I hope I can inspire you to try it out. If you are familiar, I hope you will find some workshops in this resource that will bring a story alive for the kids in your church.

What is "Workshop Rotation Model"?

This approach to Sunday School originated in 1990 at a Presbyterian Church in a suburb of Chicago. It spread throughout churches and resources were shared freely through the internet. Now it is also used for prepared curriculum. Why I think it's the best... it is story based, and you really learn the story through hearing it, retelling it and experiencing it. I used the approach for 8 years, and the kids were always enthusiastic about what we were doing.

Essentially, 3-5 creative "workshops" are prepared to focus on 1 Bible story. Each workshop deals with a different part of the story or a different lesson in the story in a unique way. The kids "rotate" through the workshops (1 a week) and by the end are telling you the story. Each workshop is completely different in the type of activity used to experience the story: from cooking to science, from art to drama, music to documentary making, movie to games, etc. When you prepare the workshops, you find the activities that best fit the story and what you want to teach. And fit best with the resources you have available, and most importantly, connect with the kids who will participate. I've used the approach for full day events as well: a PA Day program around the 10 Commandments. We started by cooking

“Commandment Cakes” in the morning and ended the day by making a movie, with other workshops in between.

From a leader’s perspective, 1 leader teaches the same workshop each week and becomes very familiar with the lesson plan (not “what am I doing this week?” panic). And a leader need only commit for a story not an entire school year. Of course, leaders who stay the year are appreciated too! You will see references to “Shepherd” in the documents. The “Shepherd” was a second set of hands that stayed with the same group of kids (grouped by age) each week. Typically this was a high school student for us.

The website that became a repository from the originators of the approach and story workshop development is <http://www.rotation.org/topic/what-is-the-workshop-rotation-model--articles> and provides a detailed description of the approach and a wealth of resources to create your own workshops (or use as provided). This is the “go to” resource for all things workshop. (Originally free, some of the material is now only available with a membership fee.) There is a wealth of material available on the internet for you to search out. It takes time, but it’s amazing what you will find.

What is available here?

6 years of story workshops I put together are here for you to adapt or adopt or use as a springboard to write your own. (See *Story Sequence* for the order we used.) I used freely available internet based resources and some books to plan and even had some moments of inspiration for original activities. One year I relied heavily on Spark Rotation prepared lessons so those will be referenced, but cannot be included here. See <http://sparkhouse.augsburgfortress.org/store/productfamily/260/Rotation>.

Lesson Plans for the story workshops that I prepared are available here for your use. The resources used to create the plan are referenced in each document. In addition to Lesson Plans, I also pulled together a *Background* document to provide the leaders with thoughtful considerations of the story, not just the aspect they would be focussing on. This gave them more material to share with the kids during the workshop.

Lesson Plans are written as a step-by-step guide to leading the workshop, and include:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Opening Prayer
- Bible Study (tell the story)
- Workshop Activity (connect with and celebrate the story)
- Closing Reflection and Prayer

We started each week with *Gathering Time*. Unfortunately I did not keep good documentation about the weekly program. Sometimes it was seasonal, or a special guest was invited, or it was related to the story. We did have music here. Our original concept was to learn a song related to the story and share this at worship. Here we decided on where the kids’ offering would go (e.g. Chickens and Goats with CLWR Gifts from the Heart) and kept track of how we were doing with our goal. We celebrated birthdays and made announcements about family activities. We invited parents to stay with their young children and participate. For us it was a way to transition from worship to workshop. We always ended with prayer. Over the years we explored different ways to pray. Ever tried a bubble gum prayer? The two favourites that we used regularly were the echo prayer with our own opening:

Leader: Hi, God.
(Everyone echoes i.e. repeats
the line.)
Leader: It's us again,
(Everyone echoes)

Leader: your G.I.F.T. Time children.
(Everyone echoes)
Leader: Asking you to help us
(Everyone echoes)
Leader: Grow In Faith Together.
(Everyone echoes)

And the prayer continues in this format.

And the second was the use of a **prayer cube**. I covered a square box with pictures: each picture representing a different area to pray for: church, home and family, friends, people needing help, the world, or someone hurting. See http://www.trinitypulaski.org/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Prayer_Cube_graphics_pdf.3130820.pdf for the source. Each person takes a turn throwing the cube like dice – and suggesting who/what to pray for based on the picture that lands face up. It was a great way to get everyone involved and make the prayer personal. Find what works for you and your group. There are lots of ways to pray! (BTW – prayer was a recurring theme in our workshops.)

Bibles – Choose Carefully

The first thing we did when we adopted the workshop rotation model was to invest in new Bibles – age appropriate ones. We open the Bibles every week and want the kids to become comfortable reading them. (While we encouraged all kids to take a turn reading out loud, we learned and respected the need for some to participate in other ways.) Find Bibles that work for you. We use these:

Spark Story Bible (kindergarten and grade 1) (before this was available we used *Read with me Bible* and there are references to this in the lesson plans; however, I would recommend the *Spark Story Bible* now.)

Discover's Bible (NIV used for grades 2-4)

Adventure Bible (NIV used for grades 5-7)

For variety we also added some copies of *The Picture Bible* which uses comic strips to tell the stories.

How our school year was organized...

From September through December we experience the stories of the Old Testament. During Advent we focus on the stories surrounding Jesus' birth and celebrate with a pageant. January through to June we explore the stories of the New Testament.

A G.I.F.T. for you...

These story workshops are shared with you to hopefully encourage you to consider a different approach to "Sunday School". Children's Ministry should be one of the most important in a congregation, and no question that there are challenges. I invested my time and we paid for the materials we used rather than curriculum. Because it was created for our situation, I found the activities that the kids related best

to and worked with the time and physical resources available to us. It was great hearing the excitement as the kids told their parents what they did in the workshop, and asking if they can come back next week. Our kids' favourite workshop was without a doubt cooking. What would yours be?

The one thing I can't give you is the valuable resource of *time*. I can't tell you this takes less time than handing out prepared curriculum sheets for the kids to fill in the blanks and colour, but I can promise you that everyone will know the stories of the Bible and the Word of God will be "written on their hearts".

You can be a part of G.I.F.T. Time. Let me share the gift with you!

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