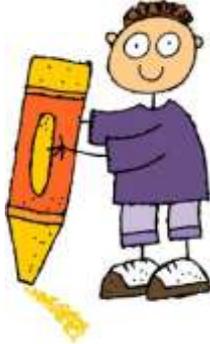


# The Theology of Coloring

I learned how to teach Sunday school from the women who taught me as a child. We'd go to class, sing a few songs, repeat a memory verse, listen to a Bible story with a moralistic application and then get out the big box of broken, smelly crayons. I colored my way through the Bible dozens of times during the course of my childhood. It was how things were done. And it's how I did things in my class, too.

And then someone asked me, "What do your students learn by coloring?"

That simple question started a chain of thought. What *do* they learn from coloring? What do they learn from the songs we sing? Is it enough just to help the children become familiar with Bible stories and send them off with a good moral lesson? Here are a few suggestions based on what I've learned in 20 years of teaching since then.



**O be careful little mouth, what you sing.** If you sing with your students in Sunday school, take a fresh look at the lyrics and what they teach. For example, nearly all children love to sing "Father Abraham" and perform the movements—but what does it mean to them, really? Or maybe you should try asking your students if they know *what* fountain is flowing deep and wide (or with bleach and Tide, depending on your song leader). I'm not against having fun with singing in Sunday school, but fun should never be the primary focus of the precious time you have with your students. Review your song list. Does it include songs with faulty theology or confusing lyrics? Believers aren't called to climb Jacob's ladder. Scripture is curiously silent about the location of Sunshine Mountain. We can do better.

My students enjoy singing Scripture set to familiar tunes. We learn one verse at a time and repeat all the songs each week. By the end of the semester they have an impressive number of verses painlessly memorized.<sup>1</sup> We also found songs that teach, for example, the books of the Bible, the ten plagues or the names of the disciples.<sup>2</sup> You can use easily find more on the Internet or write your own to reinforce your specific lesson. You may want to consider teaching your students some of the old hymns, explaining the lyrics as you all learn them together.

**Use crafts strategically.** I have a little pile of hot-glued pebbles on my desk—the craft from a recent lesson. Every time I look at it, I'm reminded of Samuel's *Ebenezer*—his stone of remembrance—and to thank God that wherever I am in

the day's schedule, I've come this far with His help. (1 Samuel 7:12) It's fine to use crafts in class as long as there is a purposeful design behind it and you explain that concept to the children. You might want to create a craft that will help your students keep the memory verse in a place where they will see it, or serve others with gifts for parents or cards for shut ins. Just be sure to ask yourself that same question, "What are my students learning by doing this?" and make sure you convey the desired answer to the children.

**Review, review, review.** Even if you teach your lesson perfectly (and who does?), by the end of class your students will retain only a small percentage of what you said. By the next Sunday, they'll remember even less. It's vital to review the previous lessons each week in order to give context to what you're teaching and to plant the stories firmly in the minds of your students.

Review can be a part of the lesson the children look forward to. Be creative. In my class, we play a review game nearly every week. Primaries always want to play boys vs. girls, and so we have an ongoing challenge between the sexes. You can find many methods for review games online, like Jeopardy or hangman. There are also variations of board games, where the children advance a token as they correctly answer questions. You might consider having the children play in teams or at least with partners and allow your students to help each other. This avoids embarrassment for the child who doesn't have an answer and teaches the children to support each other.

**Theology is not just for grown ups.** As you teach through the Bible, you will find natural opportunities to teach big concepts to your class. Don't be afraid to try! Use the right theological terms, but explain them carefully and on the student's level. For example, the story of David and Goliath is the perfect vehicle to teach what it means to think theocentrically.<sup>3</sup> Teach the difference between true repentance and remorse with the story of Saul. Explain our desperate need for an alien righteousness when you talk about the Ten Commandments. Children learn complex words in other areas of study, like science and music, so why not in your class, too?

**Point to Christ.** The ultimate goal of Christian education is to point our students to Christ. To accomplish this, you need to be intentional. Make sure you ask yourself, "What can this story teach my students about sin and salvation?" It's a challenge to find Jesus in every story that you teach, but by doing so you will be blessed by truth and you will bless your students.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, use the tune for "Jingle Bells" to sing, "For while we—were still weak—at the right time—Christ died for the ungodly. Romans five, verse six." Christian Communicators Worldwide also offers a children's Bible memory program with music at [http://www.ccwtoday.org/teachersparents\\_bibleabc.asp](http://www.ccwtoday.org/teachersparents_bibleabc.asp)

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.ccwtoday.org/teachersparents\\_learningbyheart.asp](http://www.ccwtoday.org/teachersparents_learningbyheart.asp) for some of these resources.

<sup>3</sup> You might use a visual aide to help the children see that the Israelite army saw Goliath as big because they didn't have God in the middle of their picture. David saw God as big, and so he saw Goliath as one of God's creations—subject to God's control.