Westminster Abbey
Learning

The Bible in Christian art – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this five-question survey.

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

SLIDE 3: What is the Bible?

Use this slide as an introduction or reminder about the role of the Bible for Christians. Talk about how the Bible covers God's interaction with His people throughout history, from Creation to the Last Judgement. The Bible is considered to have been written by many different people over a period of hundreds of years, but the writers are thought to have been inspired by God in their writing. The Bible contains a variety of different forms of literature including history, poetry, songs, letters and wisdom sayings.

Explain that the Bible is made up of two parts, the Old and the New Testament. Depending on prior knowledge, discuss examples that they are familiar with.

To set up the rest of the lesson, talk about how stories, characters and symbols in the Bible have inspired art which is found throughout the world.

SLIDE 4: The Fall

Ask students to look at the slide.

What kind of art is it? This stained-glass window shows a Bible story which is very important to Christians. Any ideas what it shows? Children may recognize that this is Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Read the account of The Fall (Genesis 3:1-24)

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' 2 The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die."' 4 But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,[a] knowing good and evil.' 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

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7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves…

22 Then the LORD God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever' — 23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. 24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Which details from the Bible Passage can you identify in this picture?

Click to reveal: Adam, Serpent (snake), Fruit, Angle, Fig leaves, Eve, Flaming sword, Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

What do you think a Christian looking at this window might be reminded of? The story of the Fall teaches how evil entered the world.

This picture is taken from a window remembering the life and work of John Milton (1608-1674), who wrote *Paradise Lost*, a poem based on the story in Genesis 3.

SLIDE 5: Moses

These three photos show the same figure, Moses, within Westminster Abbey. He is holding the 10 Commandments. This is a very common image to have in a church. Why do you think this is?

Moses is one of the most important figures in the Old Testament. He led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, and God revealed the 10 Commandments to him on Mount Sinai. These were written on two stone tablets which often feature in images of him.

The 10 Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-17) have always been important in Christian teaching. No one knows what Moses, or any of the people mentioned in the Bible looked like, but what similarities can you see between these three different images? Why do you think they all show Moses as old and with a long beard? What are they each made from? (Bronze, Marble, Glass)

SLIDES 6 & 7: Annunciation

What can you see in this picture?

Answers may include: Angel, words, woman, Halo, Blue, gold, manuscript, different colours – red, blue, black, gold

This image is a close-up from a hand-written book (known as a manuscript) and shows a story from the Bible where the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she is going to have a baby, Jesus. (Luke 1:26-38)

How can you tell that this was considered a very important Bible story? Think about how the picture was made and the colours used.

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In the past, artists made their own paints. They used powdered pigments mixed with egg white to make paint called ‘egg tempura’. The pigments were often ground up rocks, plants, or even beetles. The most expensive paint was made by grinding up the semi-precious blue stone, lapis lazuli, found only in the mountains of Afghanistan. Its use was confined to the most important subjects, often the robes of the Virgin Mary, Jesus’s mother, who was held in such high esteem. Gold leaf (very thin layers of gold) was applied by laying it over glue which was carefully put down in particular areas.

This is a close up of the picture which is drawn inside the initial letter, R. Although it was created 800 years ago, the colours are still vibrant and the gold still shiny.

SLIDE 8: The Last Supper

These two pictures show Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, known as the Last Supper. (Matthew 26:26-29). The first is in the centre of a golden plate which is used to collect donations of money from worshippers. The second is a mosaic which sits at the front of Westminster Abbey, behind the High Altar. The altar is the place where Christians remember Jesus last meal by sharing bread and wine in a ceremony call The Eucharist, which means ‘thanksgiving’.

SLIDE 9: Artistic talent as a gift from God

This picture shows a woven tapestry with a scene from the Bible.

For hundreds of years, Christians have used art as a form of worship, to show how important God is to them. When objects were made to last, the most talented artists were usually employed to produce it. Many people consider talent as a gift from God.

For example, in Exodus 35: 30-35, people are listed as being skilled engravers, designers, embroiderers, and weavers and that they use expensive yarn in blue, purple and scarlet. This picture shows a woven tapestry with a scene from the Bible. It is very old so has faded, but you can still see the blue wool that was used.

Read aloud this Bible passage with your pupils:

30 Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel, he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, 33 in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. 34 And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. 35 He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer. (Exodus 35:30-25)

SLIDES 10 to 14: Over to you

Tell the story of Noah and the Flood (Genesis 7-9:17). There are lots of children’s versions of this story which use simple language. Try to avoid showing them pictures so that they are able to use their imaginations.

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Here are four different activities that pupils could now complete to create art about Noah and the Flood. Delete the slides you don't need as applicable.

Activity idea 1: Comic strip

Create a comic strip of the story, without using any words. Decide on the six key elements of the story. Then draw a picture to illustrate that part e.g. Building the Ark, The Gathering of the Animals, The Flood, etc. The final picture should show the rainbow over the earth. This could be done in groups or individually.

Activity idea 2: Rainbow art

At the end of the story, God sets his rainbow in the sky as a promise that he will remember his promise to never again flood the earth. Design one piece of art which illustrates this. This could be a painting, collage, a mosaic or a piece of embroidery. Select according to what materials you have available.

Activity 3: Alms dish

Select an image from the story which could sit at the centre of an alms dish like one on slide 9. You could draw this at the centre of a paper plate and decorate it with gold or silver paper.

Activity 4: Illuminated letter

Ask children to write out the final verse of the story of Noah (Genesis 7:17). Pupils should make the first letter T extra-large and beautifully decorated, using rainbows, gold and rich blues and reds.

‘This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.’

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