

Introduction to *Running the Race*

General Introduction

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD

The middle school/junior high years mark a period of contrasts for young people who are rapidly approaching adolescence. At this stage of development, students are addressing many significant issues. Much of what young people at this age say, think, and do revolves around relationships. Early adolescents want to discuss facets of relating to others: friendships with the opposite sex, friendships with those of the same sex, relating to parents, dealing with siblings, and nurturing a close relationship with God.

In the intermediate grades, students tend to view God as a super-hero. As seventh and eighth graders, students are refining their ideas and moving toward a concept of God as friend. They are also faced with decisions that will impact their lives for many years.

At this stage, students tend to rely a great deal on peer culture for feedback. They often seek advice from each other when faced with weighty decisions. Students need basic teaching on decision-making as they explore God's loving grace and accountability. When significant adults share personal stories from their lives, seventh and eighth graders can relate key faith learnings to their own lives. **They grow in their understanding of God's grace and mercy through the stories of others.** Seventh and eighth grade students are capable of testing and applying such learnings in real life.

Young people at this crucial stage of development enjoy discussing issues relevant to their lives. They often relate to characters in story drama, plays, or stories. Middle school students benefit from hands-on activities.

MISSION PROJECT

In grades K-6, students participate in a wide variety of mission projects extended over the course of the academic year. In grades 7-8, writers give suggestions for mission projects that fit with the study of each unit. Many schools already have mission projects established for middle school students. The teacher will want to look at the ideas suggested in the unit and consider whether to facilitate new projects or to add to what s/he is already doing.

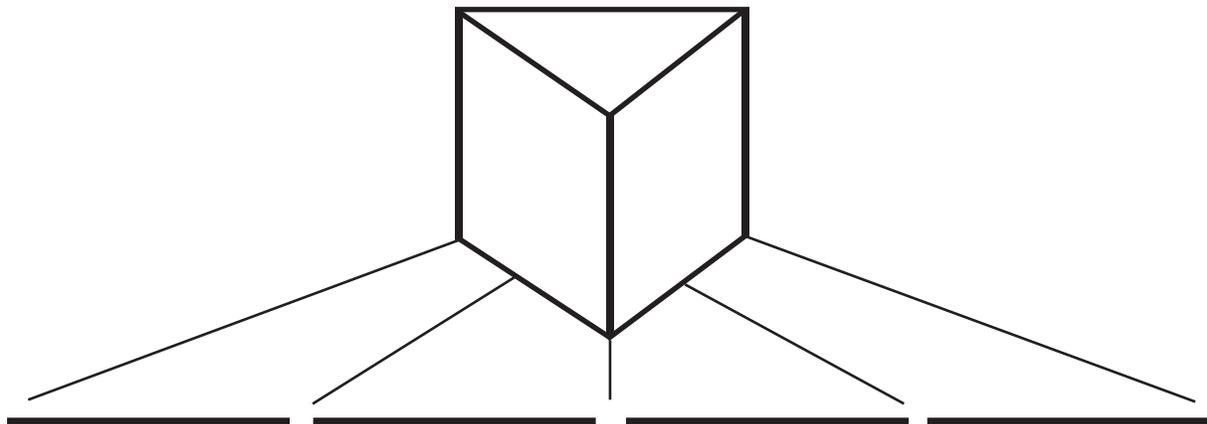
BIBLE TIMES CLOTHES CLOSET

Skits, plays, and monologues come alive when students and adults are dressed in authentic garb. There will be occasions when an adult or student needs authentic clothing from Bible times. It is important to provide appropriate garb.

We suggest that your school keep several tunics for adults and children in a central location (coat rack in faculty lounge, nurse's closet, someone's classroom, for example), for easy access. McCalls has a pattern for children's clothing from Bible times, as well as a pattern for adults. The patterns are easy to follow and will lend an air of authenticity to the character's role.

Inexpensive cotton/polyester blends work well for tunics and headgear. Two

The Anabaptist Prism



Confession	Content	Context	Values
<p><i>God offers reconciliation and shows us how to live in obedience.</i></p> <p>We are created in God’s image, but disobedience disrupts our relationship with God and with each other. In Old Testament times, God offered reconciliation to men and women when they confessed their sin and made acceptable sacrifice. In the New Testament era, persons who confess their sin come into right relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>Jesus’ life shows us how to live in love and obedience; his death on our behalf opened the way for our reconciliation to God. The Holy Spirit enables those who confess Christ as Lord to live as children of God.</p>	<p><i>The Bible is God’s written Word, an authoritative and trustworthy guide for faith and life.</i></p> <p>The Bible is God’s written Word, reliable as a guide for life and as a rule for the church community. While we believe the fullest revelation of God’s love comes with Jesus Christ in the New Testament, we also read the Old Testament as the story of God’s mercy and love.</p> <p>Believers need to know Bible stories and understand the culture of biblical times. Knowledge of biblical chronology, geography, and political history is important. Believers should recognize different literary types in the Bible and commit important passages to memory.</p>	<p><i>God uses the believing community to make right relationships practical.</i></p> <p>People who confess Jesus as Lord join the faith community for worship, service, and mutual sharing of life. Here, in tangible ways, we experience forgiveness and are accountable to each other under Holy Spirit guidance. Together we stand apart from values and activities of the world that are contrary to God’s will.</p> <p>Individuals become church members after a mature, voluntary decision to accept Jesus as Lord. Baptism, communion, foot-washing, and other symbols remind us of God’s transforming presence and our call to obedience.</p> <p>In addition to worship, a central task of the church is to share the good news of salvation.</p>	<p><i>God wants his people to live in right relationships.</i></p> <p>The cross and resurrection of Christ make possible our right relationship with God. The cross also illustrates the high price we are willing to pay as we model non-violent love, forgiveness, and humble service. Like Jesus and the prophets, we have a deep concern for those who suffer abuse, poverty, and other forms of oppression. God calls us to live in harmony with his creation and to be agents of reconciliation in a broken world.</p>

tunics and head coverings for men, two for women, and several for students should be adequate for a medium-sized school. Many parents who cannot help during school hours would be happy to create simple costumes. And children's concepts of the culture in which Jesus lived will be greatly enhanced.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Special-needs students have specific needs that cover a wide spectrum. There are gifted children, those with learning disabilities or emotional disabilities, and children with physical limitations. We have provided a variety of teaching methods with the intention of meeting the needs of all students. As you think of individual children, choose methods and activities that will ensure their success and interest during Bible class.

Every child should experience success in learning. We want children to be excited about Bible class and look forward to these special moments together. We do recognize that you will need to tailor the learning experiences to the needs of the children you teach. Each class will be different!

Children with learning disabilities may have difficulty completing some activities independently. You might want to pair that child with another student. This could be the start of a new friendship, while also helping the children learn how to work together. You may need to adapt some of the suggested learning experiences so that all children can feel successful. The web of activities provides some alternate activities as well.

Many children who experience difficulty in one area of school are unusually adept at another activity. **Find ways to make each child's gifts useful.** You could invite students to lead music from time to time, or help by finding a specific song on the cassette and making sure it is ready when needed. Children with special abilities in art may decorate the timeline figures. **Be sure to provide support for those children who, for some reason or other, become frustrated during certain activities.**

Whole-class discussions are wonderful times to make special-needs children feel special. If a student expresses interest in a topic, try to follow through with more activities and resources. As you lead discussions, help all students feel valued as you affirm them for their thoughtful responses.

As children are working independently or in groups, step back and observe what is taking place. Are students learning? What are they learning? What are they teaching each other? What should happen tomorrow to extend their learning?

God is, indeed, present at every step of the way. You are on a special journey that requires much faith, patience, wisdom, and discernment. May God bless you richly as you lead children to marvelous and wondrous discoveries!

At the Crossroads

UNIT OVERVIEW

"Thus says the Lord: Stand at the Crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). We all stand at crossroads at different points in our lives. Middle school can be one of those crossroad moments. In middle school, students begin to make more decisions for themselves, and they begin to be treated more like adults. Students are realizing that they have the power to decide who they are and who they want to be. This unit can help them learn to make good decisions about their lives.

In many ways this unit is a Christian ethics course. Good choices are an extension of a healthy, positive sense of self and the ability to recognize and express feelings in a healthy manner. The first and second strands work at a basis for good decision making. The core question is "How do we make decisions?" The larger theme is that for Christians good decisions are based on the life of Jesus and the story of God described in the Bible.

Strand three encourages students to think about who they are, because who they are determines how they will make their decisions. It encourages them to explore their feelings, talents, thoughts and backgrounds so they can understand themselves in a different way.

Strands four and five deal with tough choices that students must face as Christians. Strand four focuses on interpersonal interactions. How do I act like a Christian with those I know? Do I act the way everyone else does, or should I act differently as a Christian? What are those different actions? Do I listen to others? Do I learn how to keep conflict from getting out of hand? Do I learn stories from the media or from the Bible? Strand five allows students to apply their learning through a variety of projects (individual and group) as well as presentations.

Unit Information

SUMMARY

Seventh and eighth graders are in the midst of many changes in their lives. They are able to make decisions for themselves, but they are not always sure how to make those decisions. The various activities in these lessons encourage students to think about how they make decisions. These lessons encourage students to base their decision making on knowledge of themselves, their abilities and biblical standards.

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

I Corinthians 9:24-27, 10:13

Psalm 139: 1-18

Romans 12:1-5, 9-21

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Individuals make decisions based on their goals. The Christian goal is to follow Jesus.
- Following Jesus means learning to act as Jesus did.
- God created each person uniquely and loves each one. God created who we are, what we can do and how we feel.
- As Christians, we face tough choices about what to do interpersonally and globally.

WORSHIP

This unit has worship elements incorporated within the lessons; however, you may wish to establish an opening or ending ritual that involves prayer, sharing or music. During the journaling times, playing instrumental music is one way to set a worshipful and peaceful tone for students.

MISSION PROJECT

This unit lends itself well to a number of mission projects because of the nature of strands four and five. Here are a few suggestions:

MCC Relief Kits: Choose one of MCC's relief kit projects such as school kits, or health kits. Encourage students to bring in items to fill the kits. Check with MCC about where the kits might go. MCC's website is an excellent resource (www.mcc.org). Help the students to understand that these kits could go to help kids like them in other countries.

Food Bank: For a more local mission project, invite a representative from a local food bank to come and speak to the class, or if you are able, take a field trip to the food bank to see how it works. Challenge students to bring in needed items.

At this age, students like to understand the concrete results of their mission. Additional mission project ideas include: sponsoring a child through Compassion International or contributing money to buy a family an animal through the Heifer project.

STUDENT JOURNALS

For several lessons students are encouraged to write in student journals. These should be a one-inch three-ring binder with lined paper. Each worksheet or hand out you give the students should be hole-punched and placed in this binder. You may choose to copy all the handouts at once and create a workbook for the unit.

Students should be aware that you will be reading everything in their journal. This is one way you will be evaluating their work. If there is something they do not want you to read, they should not write it in their journal. With that said, assure the students that what you read will be kept confidential. Unless they write about a serious problem in their journal, such as an eating disorder or abuse, you will be the only one who knows the content of the journals.

This provides an example of an important decision students are making at this age— self-disclosure. This will give them a chance to choose their rate of disclosure to you, without fearing that their friends or parents will discover things they don't want them to know. Hold their journals in strict confidence, unless there is a serious problem, in which case address it with the student first, before taking it to another adult.

HOME CONNECTION

Included are newsletters that can be sent home with each student so that parents can be informed about the student's learning. Each worksheet gives background on the strand, questions for parents to ask students about their learning, and suggestions for home worship or devotions.

RESOURCES

Dr. Seuss. *The Butter Battle Book*. Random House, Inc., 1984.
ISBN 0394865804 (Tough Choices for Me, Lesson 4)

Oyer, John S. and Robert S. Kreider. *Mirror of the Martyrs*. Good Books, 1990.
(Cross Training, Lesson 2, Extend the Lesson)

Van Braght, Thieleman J. *Martyrs Mirror*. Herald Press 1938.
(Cross Training, Lesson 2, Extend the Lesson)

ASSESSING TEACHING/LEARNING

- Worksheets: Assess based on quality and completion of the assignment.
- Student Journals: Assess quality and completion of assignments
- Tests (Strands 2-4): tests are included to assess comprehension
- Projects (Strand 5)

MEMORY PASSAGES

The suggested passages for this unit are:
1 Corinthians 1:24-27, 10:13
Psalm 139:1-7, 12-16
Romans 12:1-2, 9-18