

Creative Ways to Energize Your Sunday School

**By Debbie Kolacki of
PRC – Practical Resources for Churches**



Look around – what do you see?



We're affected by the physical space around us. Our moods are affected by the color of a wall or the amount of light in a room. It may be harder to concentrate when surrounded by clutter.

A study was done with two restaurants. One was a plain coffee shop with a menu which listed dishes in simple terms. Another was elegantly decorated with candles on the tables and had a menu with items described in extravagant language. The same food was served in both restaurants but the food at the fancy restaurant was rated much better tasting by diners.

Our physical surroundings in Sunday school send a message as well. If children's classrooms are located in a dark, musty basement room, the children will feel, either consciously or unconsciously, less valued than the adults who are sitting in the beautiful sanctuary or in nicer looking classrooms.

Consider all your space and use it to advantage: include meeting halls, hallways, and classrooms. Get down to a child's eye level; hang posters accordingly and make sure your furniture is the appropriate size. Make your space cheerful with bright colors and interesting objects. Make sure your classroom is clean, even if you have to clean it yourself!

Use walls and bulletin boards to their full potential

Consider finding someone in your congregation with artistic talent to create murals for walls. Party stores and websites such as [Oriental Trading](#) and [Rhode Island Novelty](#) sell backdrops and other decorating items. Websites such as [Christian Supply](#) sell posters, bulletin board sets, and other decorating items for Sunday school classrooms.

Pick a theme



Consider having a theme for your Sunday school. This can stay the same or change every year. You might want to continue the theme of your Vacation Bible School in your Sunday school program.

Instead of calling your program Sunday school, how about picking a fun name? Some names from the rotation.org website include:

- Discovery Kingdom
- Bible Treasureland
- Faith Forest
- Sunday Space (space theme)
- The Bible Village
- Bible Adventures
- C.O.O.L. (Children of our Lord)
- SpyKids, Kids Investigating Divine Stories

Once Sunday school teacher I know used a Narnia theme one year. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* book starts out in winter and then the land gradually thaws as spring (and Aslan) approaches. The teacher started the year with her classroom decorated as a winter scene with artificial frost on the windows, etc. As the year progressed the room gradually came back to life with plants and greenery. I imagine this made an impression on her students that they'll remember the rest of their lives!

Make it personal

We often hear that faith is “caught” not “taught.” Henrietta Mears, who founded the Gospel Light Publishing Company, said this about Sunday school students: “First I learn to love my teacher, then I learn to love my teacher’s God.” How you teach may be more important than what you teach. Part of a teacher’s job is to create a place where children feel loved and welcomed. Share things about yourself and your life with your students. Create a sense of community by having a class name and creating a class banner.



Notice when they’re not there

Stay in touch with your students by sending birthday cards and postcards. Companies like [Christian Supply](#) and [Christian Book Distributors](#) sell Happy Birthday postcards as well as ones that say “We missed you in Sunday school” or “We’re glad you were here.”

Send e-mails to your students and parents with information about what’s being studied in Sunday school and provide links to websites for children with Christian themed games, activities, and coloring pages. You could have a contest each week with a trivia question related to what is being learned in the classroom.

Have a separate area on your church website for your Sunday school and children’s ministry and consider having a Sunday school Facebook group.

Show off your students’ work and get to know them

You can take photos of them and post them on a bulletin board with the words “God loves _____.” This will also help you learn the children’s names and use them.

Display artwork and other projects on bulletin boards in the classroom, halls, in the church newsletter, the church bulletin, etc.

Play some get acquainted games when classes first start.

Have students make posters or fill out a questionnaire about themselves.

Get others involved

Get parents and relatives involved with what's going on in the classroom. Invite them to an open house, have a class parent (or grandparent) each month, invite a family member to read a story, do a craft, or share a hobby with the class. Communicate with them by e-mail and send home spiritual family activities, such as an Advent wreath made in Sunday school along with family activities to do when the candles are lit.

Invite adults from the congregation to participate in Sunday school in other ways besides teaching. Adults can pray for a particular class, send out birthday cards, or share something about themselves with the children. An older adult who grew up in the church might come in and talk about how things were in Sunday school when they were a child.

Some churches have a Laity Sunday, where the service is led by lay people. This might be a good time to invite your pastor to come and visit with the children. He or she could share the meaning of the vestments, symbols around the church, etc.

Have a "Bring a Friend" Sunday at least once a year and make sure the children know they can bring friends to Sunday school any time.

Have someone dress up as a Bible character that's being studied and visit your classes. Take lots of photos!

Engage all the senses

Learning activities using sight

- Reading
- Looking at props
- Looking at pictures
- Watching DVDs
- Puzzles and activity sheets
- Maps and diagrams
- Creating time lines
- Journaling
- Creative writing
- Making a class mural or banner
- Painting and drawing



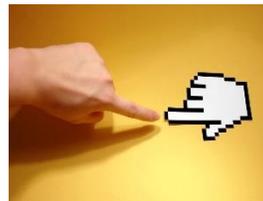
Learning activities using hearing

- Listening to a story
- Creating sound effects
- Music – singing and instruments
- Raps and chants
- Group discussions
- Interviewing people
- Recording themselves



Learning activities using touch

- Crafts
- Dance
- Skits
- Games
- Using hand motions when listening to a story
- Creating a model scene



Learning activities using smell

- Incense: frankincense and myrrh
- Herbs
- Plants in the Bible
- Foods
- Potpourri



Learning activities using taste

- Bible time foods. Pita bread, raisins, grapes, etc.
- Food activities that coordinate with the lesson:
 - Passover meal for the Last Supper
 - animal crackers for Noah and creation lessons
 - goldfish crackers for the Feeding of the 5,000
- Putting together food packets for the needy



Make your storytelling exciting

As a Sunday school teacher, you are privileged to be one of a long line of storytellers who have been sharing their faith for thousands of years. With practice and effort, you can learn the skills which will make you a good storyteller.



Tips for telling stories

Remember you are not reading the story; you are creating an experience for the children through the story. Get rid of your self-consciousness and get into the story! Make sure you know the story well so you can tell it without referring to notes. Know why the story is important for your children to hear.

Draw the children into the story by asking questions such as: "Have you ever been scared? Today I'm going to tell you the story of a little girl who learned what to do when she was scared."

Involve all the senses. Dress in costume; even a simple shawl can create a mood. Have the children sit with you around a pretend campfire or on a special rug. Use props, including items that the children can smell, touch, and taste.

Make eye contact with the children and use your whole body to tell the story. Let your facial expressions, hand movements, and voice create excitement, joy, fear, and other emotions.

Use dialogue as you tell the story and, if you're brave enough, use different voices for the characters.

Get the children involved in the action by having them do hand motions or say a word when you give them a verbal or visual cue. Tell the children to imagine they are feeling things like wind or rain.

Practice in front of the mirror or in front of another person.

Have fun!

More ways to make storytelling fun

How about setting up a special storytelling area in your classroom? A sheet can be draped from the ceiling to create a tent.

You can [buy an artificial campfire](#) or make your own so you can tell stories around the fire. Use a piece of wood or other material as a base, then have Christmas lights, orange and red cellophane, and some logs glued together. You can find ideas by doing an internet search or searching on Pinterest.



Make it dramatic

Most children love to dress up. Get them really involved in the story by acting out the Bible stories they're learning in costume. With older children, they might create a skit where they put a modern spin on a Bible story or parable.

Ask around to see if there's anyone in your congregation who might be willing to make costumes for your class.

Video tape the performance and edit it with software to add titles, music, etc. then invite students and their families to a movie viewing.



Change is good

Children are fascinated with the church year and its different seasons, colors, and symbols. If you have a class altar or table, change the cloth on it according to the colors of the church year. Change the décor of your room when the church seasons change and include appropriate symbols. Don't forget to explain the symbols to the children.

Have fun with a class pet



This is Barnabus Bear who travels with me when I do Sunday school teacher training or visit teachers at different churches. I always try to take a photo with the teachers and Barnabus. He also is part of the publicity for our online teacher training courses and is seen on Facebook.

Why not adopt a class pet or mascot of your own that can become a part of classroom activities? Take the children's pictures with your class pet. He or she can even be taken home by the students, accompanied by a prayer journal with suggested prayers for the family to say with your pet.

These types of things create class unity and are just plain fun!

Spiritual Experiences

Most importantly, invite God into your classroom and let the children know frequently that God is with them in the classroom and all the time.

Have a class altar with a flameless candle that is lit with a prayer and then let the children know that the light reminds us that God is with us.



Look for opportunities to pray at various times during your class, such as when a child shares a concern about a sick relative or an argument they had with a friend.

Use other spiritual practices in the classroom such as guided meditations and saying the Lord's Prayer with body motions. Create prayer beads with the children and send them home with instructions on how to use them.

Pray regularly for your class.

Living what we believe

Your Sunday school class or Sunday school as a whole can work on a service or mission project or you can join in a project being organized by the whole church or another church group. It's important for children to serve in various ways; they shouldn't just be learning about their faith but should be living it.



Don't forget to visit our [website](#), [Facebook page](#), [Pinterest boards](#) and [blog](#) for more free resources and information.

Please consider making a donation on our website so that we can continue to offer our booklets free of charge.

www.prcli.org

