

Lesson 20

Making Silence

Inviting Children into A Silence Full of Significance, Waiting, and Expectation

How to Use This Lesson

- Synthesis Lesson: “Synthesis” lessons make a synthesis of key lessons in the four genres. They are meant to be used with children ages 9–12.
- Silence: This genre of classical Christian language is found in the way Godly Play lessons are presented. The mindfulness, measured pace, and leaving pauses contribute to this. The prayers and reflection during the feast are also examples.
- It is part of a comprehensive approach to Christian formation that consists of eight volumes. Together the lessons form a spiral curriculum that enables children to move into adolescence with an inner working knowledge of the classical Christian language system to sustain them all their lives.

The Material

- Location: The Godly Play Room and the Church
- Pieces: None
- Underlay: None

Background

Silence is hard to speak about, because it is wordless. In addition, many languages harbor an ambiguity about the related experiences of sound and movement. In German, the word for “quiet” is *die Ruhe* or *die Stille*. The word for “still” is *die Stille*. The word for “silence” is *Das Schweigen* (or *die Ruhe* or *die Stille*). In Latin *quietus* means “quiet,” *tranquillus* means “still,” and *silentium* means “silence.” Obviously, these three words in English overlap in meaning as well.

It is almost impossible to impose logical clarity on this ambiguity. For example, we might call “quiet” the larger category and say that there are two kinds of quiet. One is stillness, which comes from inner calm. The other is silence, which comes from making no sound but is imposed from the outside. This is tidy, but usage resists.

There is a third and fourth kind of quiet to complicate matters. Sometimes there is nothing to say. At other times there is too much to say. One might be overwhelmed by the senses or reflection on what is felt (or known). One becomes mute. Any one of the four fundamental relationships—God, the deep self, others, and nature—can involve being overwhelmed, which in turn draws the other three into the silence.

At every stage of a Godly Play session there is silence: entering, the lesson, wondering, art and material responses, the feast, and saying good-bye. A comfort with silence is taught by showing it and the felt assumption that silence is not empty but full, and can be overwhelming.

Why is the practice of silence and all of its four fundamental relationships important for children? We can force children to be silent, but it is stillness (from within) that children need if they are going to learn anything well. We can't fill a cup that is already full of noise. The ability to contemplate creates the space for filling and it is the foundation for wonder, which opens the creative process, which in turn gives us life.

Notes on the Material

This lesson comes after casually asking children where “the silence materials” are. This question is extended by walking round the room, pausing by the different shelves, and touching the Sacred Stories, the Parables, and the Liturgy materials. “Let's see, here are the Sacred Stories. Here are the Parables. Here are the materials about what we do in church. Where are the silence materials?” You can then smile and move on to something else without answering your question. This arouses the children's curiosity. “What in the world does that mean? What are the silence materials? Where could they be?” When the children begin to talk about this, it is time for the lesson.

Special Notes

The second part of this lesson suggests you take the children into the church worship space to “make silence.” If you are unable to take the children into the sanctuary (sometimes Godly Play happens when something else is happening in the church), you could take the group to another part of the building (a chapel, a community hall, or a garden).

In this lesson, the storyteller indicates that it's time to make silence by touching his or her forehead. In some traditions this is the first step in making the sign of the cross. If you are in a community that uses the sign of the cross often, you might decide to complete the action.

Movements

Get up from your place in the circle and begin to look for the silence materials.

Touch some the Sacred Story materials, some of the Parables, and some of the Liturgical Action Lessons.

Return to your place in the circle and begin.

Model for the children how you want them to sit—legs folded underneath you and your hands resting quietly in your lap.

When there is really silence you acknowledge it.

Words

Some of you have been asking where the silence materials are. Today I'm going to show you.

Now watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to find this lesson.

Here are the Sacred Stories. Here are the Parables. Here are the materials about what we do in church . . . I wonder where the Silence materials are? Hmmm . . .

We won't be able to find them until we find silence. So, I wonder if we can make some silence together? I don't know, but shall we try? Are you ready?

Let's start by sitting quietly. Can you keep your hands and your body still, like when the wind stops blowing and the waves on a lake become still? Let's see if we can be like a lake, and there are no waves.

Now let's close our eyes. Yes. I know that feels weird, but I think it will help us to really feel the silence. This is because there is an inside as well as an outside to silence.

There. We did it. We made some silence. Now let's open our eyes.

We made silence here, but I wonder if we can make it anywhere?

Let's go into the church and see if we can make silence there, too. When we go in, try not to sit next to anyone. Find a place where you can be all alone because it's easier then to listen for the inside and the outside silence.

Movements

Lead the children into the church and wait quietly while they find places to sit.

Touch your forehead to indicate it is time to begin.

Sit quietly for five to ten minutes.

Stand up when it is time to leave and then lead the children back to the Godly Play Room. When all are settled back in the circle begin the wondering.

Words

Let's begin to make silence when I touch my forehead. I will stand up when it's time to go back to our Godly Play Room.

I wonder what part of making silence you like best?

I wonder what part was the most important?

I wonder how much you were really in the silence?

I wonder if being in the church helped or got in the way?

I wonder whether you felt God in the silence?

If you felt God in the silence, did God come from beyond, from beside you in the church and the people, or did God come from within?

I wonder where the silence is—in our Godly Play Room right now?

I wonder if the silence wherever it is, is empty?

I wonder if silence wherever it is, is full?

I wonder how talking about silence is different than being silent?

I wonder what your work will be today? You might make something about silence. Maybe you want to work with one of the stories. There are so many things you can choose from. Only you know what is right for you.