

ESTHER

DRAMA WORKSHOP

PASSAGE

Story: The Book of Esther

Key/Memory Verse: Esther 4:14b

PURPOSE

During this drama workshop, the students will hear and discuss the story of Esther. In order to more fully understand the motivations of the characters in the story, the students will do role-playing. They will think about and become characters in and related to the story, and make up conversations about what happened to them "today."

Objectives for Drama Workshop

In addition to the rotation objectives, by the end of this Drama Workshop the students will be able to:

- Retell the story of Esther in their own words;
- Have an insight into the feelings of Esther and Mordecai when they were in danger and after they were safe;
- Understand that following God and doing God's will may be scary or even risky;
- Know that we can ask for help in our prayers. God protects us.

Review Bible Background

Materials List

- Bible(s) and scroll of Esther (Megillah Esther)
- Bible times costumes and groggers (made in Art workshop)

Advance Preparation Requirements

Costumes

Note that costumes need not be elaborate. A simple long vest-type tunic with a belt will take a child out of the everyday and allow him or her to imagine herself in Bible Times.

Storytelling – your preparation

Take time to read the Book of Esther in one sitting. You will discover that Esther is like a

romance novel with a beautiful heroine and a wicked villain.

Read the story in several translations of the Bible and Bible storybooks to see other ways to tell it.

It is traditional at the Purim celebration during the reading of the story for listeners to shake noisemakers called groggers to drown out Haman's name. During the lesson have the listeners practice before you begin; you may want to limit your listeners to three shakes (shake-shake- shake) each time his name is said.

Bring the story to life with your movement and emotions as well as the words. In particular, show Haman's disgust as he announces what a great man Mordecai is while leading the horse.

If you cannot learn this story by heart -- to tell it in your own words, read and reread it until you are very comfortable with it. Then you will be able to look up and make eye contact and interact with your listeners, which will help bring the story to life for them as you read. In fact, Esther is written literature, and is meant to be read, not told. Consider using your "cheat sheet" copy of the story on the scroll. This is so that it looks like the Megillah: a scroll containing the book of Esther, traditionally read at Purim.

PRESENTATION

Open - Introduction

Students can put on costumes as they arrive -- and thus be transported to another time and place.

Pray using words such as: God, Thank You for bringing us together today. Be with us as we hear Your word and search for its meaning in our lives. Amen.

Introduce the story, briefly explaining that this story is celebrated during the Jewish celebration of Purim. The events in this story took place well before Jesus was born, but after the time of King David. The story takes place in foreign courts, not in Israel, just like the stories of Daniel and his friends.

Tell the story of Esther, using the adaptation provided, or read it from a "Megillah," a traditional scroll read at Purim. Explain that it is a Jewish tradition at Purim (pronounced poor-im) to make noise to drown out Haman's name. Practice saying "Haman" and have the students shake their groggers. Limit it to three shakes each time to keep control of the noise.

Review the characters: King Xerxes, Queen Vashti (due to time limitations, not included in this lesson), Mordecai, Esther, Haman, Servants, Jewish people.

Review the setting: Xerxes' palace in Susa, the capital of Persia.

Queen Esther Saves Her People

Story adapted for retelling by Amy Crane from the book of Esther, Today's English Version. Scripture taken from the Good News Bible in Today's English Version - Second Edition, Copyright (c) 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission.

Long ago in Persia there was a king named Xerxes. He chose the most beautiful woman in the land to be his wife, a Jewish woman named Esther. She had grown up in the house of her Uncle Mordecai. However, on her uncle's advice, she told no one at the palace that she was Jewish.

One day, Esther's Uncle Mordecai heard two of the king's guards plotting to kill the king! Mordecai told Esther, who told King Xerxes. An investigation took place, Mordecai was right, and the plotters were hanged. Mordecai's name was included in the King's official records of the Empire for that day.

The Prime Minister was a man named Haman. He was a vain and evil man. He wanted everyone to bow to him when he walked by. But Esther's Uncle Mordecai would not bow down to the man Haman. You can imagine how this made Haman feel. He was MAD! No amount of yelling or stomping about would change Mordecai. When Haman found out that Mordecai was a Jew, he had an idea.

Haman went to King Xerxes. "There are people in your land that do not follow your rules. They are different, and follow their own rules. I think we should get rid of them."

"Do whatever you think is best." And King Xerxes gave the ring that was used to stamp official proclamations to the enemy of the Jews.

So Haman cast pur, kind of like die, to find the best date to do the awful thing he planned. And then he sent out the announcement to all the lands ruled by King Xerxes: "On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, kill all the Jewish people."

When Mordecai heard the news, he sent a message to Queen Esther: "Please talk to the king. You must try to save your people."

Esther sent a message back to Mordecai. "You know I cannot go to see the king unless I am summoned. Anyone who goes to see the king without the king having called for them will be killed, unless the king holds out his scepter to them."

Mordecai sent back a message: "Don't think that you are safe. Remember, you too are a Jew. Just because you are Queen does not mean that you will not be killed. ***Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.***"

Esther was terrified. But she knew what she must do. She sent another message to Mordecai. "Please gather all the Jews in town together. Don't eat or drink anything for

three days. Fast and pray. Pray that God will be with me and protect us all when I go to speak to King Xerxes in three days."

So for three days, all the Jews in town did nothing but pray. For three days, Queen Esther did nothing but pray.

On the third day, Queen Esther put on her best royal robes and her crown. Slowly she walked to the throne room as she prayed to God to be with her.

She reached the throne room. King Xerxes was frowning. But he saw that it was his lovely Queen approaching, and he smiled and held out his scepter. "My dear wife, what can I do for you?"

"Your Majesty, please come to a banquet I am preparing tonight. And bring Haman."

That night King Xerxes and Haman shared a fine meal with the Queen. "Now what can I do for you," asked the King.

"Please, both of you come again for dinner tomorrow night. I will tell you then what I wish."

My, how proud Haman was! He called his wife and friends together. "I had a private dinner with the King and Queen tonight, and will do the same tomorrow night. I am important. But that man Mordecai won't bow to me!"

His wife and friends had a suggestion: "Why don't you build a gallows and ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai tomorrow? Then you can go to the banquet tomorrow night happy."

Haman thought this was an excellent idea, so he had the gallows built.

That same night, King Xerxes could not sleep. So he called for an aide to read the official records to him, hoping that they would bore him to sleep. The part that was read included the story of Mordecai uncovering the plot to assassinate him. He asked, "I don't remember. How did we honor and reward this Mordecai?"

"I don't believe we did, sir."

By this time it was early morning and Haman had arrived at the palace and was anxiously waiting to see King Xerxes. "Bring him in," said the king.

Haman entered the throne room and bowed low. Before he had a chance to speak, the king began, "There is someone I wish very much to honor. What should I do?"

Haman thought, "Who would the king want to honor so much? Me, of course!" He replied, "I would have royal robes brought for m -- for this man. Ornament your finest

horse. Then have one of your highest noblemen lead the horse with this man mounted on it through the city square. Have the nobleman announce, 'See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor!'"

"Great idea -- go get the robes and horse ready and then find Mordecai the Jew. It is he I wish to honor. Do everything you said."

So Haman got the king's finest robes and ornamented the king's horse and found Mordecai. Mordecai got on the horse and Haman led the horse, announcing, "See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor!" And then Haman went home in embarrassment.

That evening, King Xerxes and Haman again shared a fine meal with the Queen. "Now, please tell me what can I do for you," asked the King.

"All my people will soon be killed," Esther told the king.

"Who would do such a thing!?"

"That man, Haman, your prime minister, has ordered that all the Jewish people be killed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month."

King Xerxes was furious. He ordered that Haman be hung immediately on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. King Xerxes made Mordecai the Prime Minister in Haman's place.

But the Jew's problems were not over, for a proclamation in the king's name stamped with the royal seal cannot be undone. So King Xerxes granted the Jews the right to defend themselves. The good news soon spread throughout the land and on the thirteenth day of Adar the Jews triumphed over their enemies.

And so, to this day the Jewish people celebrate Queen Esther's bravery and remember God's faithfulness to those who ask for help every spring at a Festival called Purim.

Dig - Main Content

Today, we will recreate what may have happened when Esther was preparing to go before King Xerxes and also what happened after Haman led Mordecai around Susa to honor him. These scenes are not in the Scripture, so you will need to think about what sort of people Esther, Mordecai and Haman were and how they might have reacted and what they may have said.

But first, let's warm up our drama muscles, our imaginations.

Mime the emotional response of :

- Esther when chosen to be queen;
- Mordecai and Esther when they hear of the plan to kill all Jewish people;
- Haman when invited to the banquet given by the queen;
- Esther when the King says he can't change a decree.

All can participate at the same time. This is fun in front of a mirror so the students can practice exaggerated expressions. Note that there are a variety of responses that may be correct. We don't know if Esther was sad or angry or afraid when she was chosen to be queen, or if Haman was puzzled or excited when he was invited to dine privately with the king and queen. Encourage the students to respond freely and creatively.

Practice reciting the memory verse together in different ways. Have it on a poster or slip of paper for those who have not yet learned it. Think about how Mordecai may have said it - angry, tired resignation, whining, demanding

In role-playing, we put ourselves in someone else's shoes and experience how that person might feel and act. Let's think about "What happened next?" in various parts of the story. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Just think about what sort of people the characters were. Each role-play should only last a few minutes. The teachers should wander around the classroom to help partners think. Pairs that run out of ideas before others should be encouraged to trade parts or think of other characters that could be involved in the story and role-play them.

Role-play #1

Read Esther 4:10-17.

Each student should find a partner. If there are an odd number of students, form one trio or have one of the teachers be a partner. One person is Esther, the other is one of her helpers -- a lady-in-waiting or a eunuch. The helper has noticed that Esther has eaten nothing for three days. Ask her about it. The teacher should not suggest how the roles should be played, but should ask questions to help the students clarify their roles.

Possible questions for the helper: Do you like Esther? Are you worried about her? Has she ever done anything like this before? Have you ever done anything like this? Possible questions for Esther: Do you trust your servant? Does it help to talk about problems with a friend? How do you feel after three days of no food? How do you feel after three days of prayer?

Ask a few partners to volunteer to share their role-play with the class. Discuss the role-play. These are not meant to be polished dramatic productions. Students should be observing and thinking about the characters and situations. Do you agree that a character would have felt/reacted this way? How else might it have happened? What else might have been said?

Role-play #2

Read Esther 6:6-11

Each student should find a different partner. If there are an odd number of students, form one trio or have one of the teachers be a partner. One person is Mordecai, the other one is his wife -- we'll assume he had one -- or a close friend. The wife/friend asks Mordecai where he's been all day --or maybe he/she saw Haman parading Mordecai around and asks about it.

If it is a large class or if time permits, some partners can be Haman and his wife or friend, and they can ask about the same event.

Some questions to help the students clarify their roles: For Mordecai's wife/friend: Were you proud to see Mordecai recognized so visibly by the king? Do you think it was appropriate recognition? For Mordecai: How does it feel to be "one up" on Haman? Do you think he will leave you alone now? For Haman's wife/friend: Did you see the parade? How did you feel? What do you think Haman was feeling? What do you think the king was thinking -- did he have a clue about the problems between these two men? For Haman: How did you feel? How can you let your wife/friend know you are still a powerful man in the king's court -- or is that not important any more?

Ask a few partners to volunteer to share their role-play with the class. Discuss the role-play. These are not meant to be polished dramatic productions. Students should be observing and thinking about the characters and the situations. Do you agree that a character would have felt/reacted this way? How else might it have happened? What else might have been said?

Reflect - Closure

Questions to discuss

- What did Esther do that was brave? Why?
- Sometimes we know that we should do something because it is the right thing to do, but we are afraid. Have any of you been in a situation like this? I wonder what we can do to help keep fear under control?
- Talk about breath prayers: when we are afraid or alone, God is still near. Practice praying a simple prayer quietly/silently while breathing in and out: "God is near" or "God be with me" are appropriate choices for this meditative spiritual practice.
- I wonder what thing God might have planned for me to do someday?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, Thank You for helping us recognize injustice. Help us to act bravely, as Esther did, to do the right thing, even when it is hard or scary. Thank You for being with us when we feel alone or afraid. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, so that we do not miss Your kingdom's goals. Amen.

SOURCES

Smith, Judy Gattis. *26 Ways to Use Drama in Teaching the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.

Scripture quotations taken from/adapted from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright (c) 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Look for books on Esther:

Armstrong, Carole. *Women of the Bible*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Bach, Alice. *Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible*. New York: Delacorte, 1991.

Chaikin, Miriam. *Esther*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1987.

Gelman, Rita. *Queen Esther Saves Her People*. New York: Scholastic, 1998.