

Teachers Workshop: Teaching The Christmas Story

Teaching Methods for Religion Teachers | Jeanfurgal.org



Part III • Teacher Trainer's Workshop Script

Study Of Teaching Methods Used In The Christmas Story Sing-Along

The purpose of this teacher-training workshop is to acquaint teachers with a variety of teaching methods and to teach them when, why and how to use them.

This document contains the complete teacher training workshop script for *Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story*. It provides the Workshop Leader with analysis of the sing-along teaching method, and useful commentary on other teaching methods as they occur in the classroom lesson plan.

Understanding the nature and application of the methods used in teaching the Christmas story prepares teachers to create a you-are-there experience in the classroom. Students will be inspired to participate more fully in the lesson. Ideally, the outcome is for students to embrace the message of the Christmas story in their hearts (educate the emotions), and gain firmer knowledge of their Christian faith (educate the mind).

Time required for *Teaching The Christmas Story* workshop is two to three hours, depending on the amount of time spent in discussion. Include a 10-minute break each hour.

Workshop Materials & Preparation

Each workshop participant will receive a copy of:

- Part I: Classroom lesson plan for *Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story*
- Part II: Dramatizing The Christmas Story In The Classroom
- The *Joseph and Mary Dialog*
- Classroom Teaching Methods Handout
- Sheet music for the five Christmas carols*

(visit www.JeanFurgal.org to download these materials)

The above teaching materials are contained in this workshop kit. The Workshop Leader should have the same set of materials in hand, plus a copy of this Workshop Script (Part III).

* To avoid copyright issues, I leave acquiring sheet music to your support staff.

Introduction

Describe goals of Teaching The Christmas Story Workshop.

Our goal for this workshop is to learn how to present knowledge of our faith through a teaching method that is so attractive, our students will easily understand the lesson and choose to become more involved in the Christian story. To this end, we seek a good marriage of teaching methods and lesson content.

Explain the teaching methods used in the lesson.

The classroom lesson plan for *Teaching the Christmas Story* is created as a sing-along framed with storytelling techniques and historical context. The lesson plan includes many other teaching methods that will be noted. While the lesson plan was created for actual classroom use, it will be used here for the demonstration lesson.

Why are singing and storytelling the methods of choice for teaching the Christmas story? When a classroom lesson is so complicated that students will tire and lose concentration, it must employ teaching methods that continuously energize and refocus the mind.

The Christmas story qualifies as "complicated." As religion teachers, we have many objectives. We must ask students to accept and remember a long series of events and become acquainted with a large number of people. We want them to understand the meaning of these events. And, we wish for our students to care deeply about the message of the Christmas story.

Using Sing-Along As A Teaching Method

A sing-along fulfills many of our objectives for teaching the Christmas story. Group singing motivates students to stay engaged, and stimulates them as we move through the subject matter. Music Therapy research indicates that group singing causes subjects to feel euphoric. The act of making music floods our bodies with dopamine and other positive hormones.^[1] The Sing-along teaching method puts the class into an ideal mood for learning. These hormones cause their minds to become more suggestible so that students are more receptive to the message of the Christmas Story.

Using Storytelling As A Teaching Method

Storytelling is the most powerful teaching method of all, because the brain processes imagined experiences in the same way that it processes external events. The storyteller invites students to "enter the scene," and experience the Christmas story in their imaginations. If they do this, students will identify with the emotions and reactions of the people who experienced the event in biblical times.

Summary Of Goals

- A. *To identify and study the various teaching methods used in the Christmas story lesson plan.* When teachers learn how and why each method is used, their own teaching skills escalate.
- B. *To learn how to create a you-are-there experience for students.* When students sing the carols associated with the Christmas story, they experience the actual emotions felt by the people who were present in biblical times.

- C. *To learn how to strengthen the connection between the students and the biblical people and events.* Storytelling provides students with facts, context, and visual imagery that make the biblical people and events feel more real.

Leaders' Script

Describe the workshop structure.

The teachers-in-training will experience the classroom sing-along lesson just as their students will. This will help them understand the reactions and needs of their students when they teach the Christmas Story.

Break into buzz groups.

1. Following the Leader's introduction, the teachers will form into buzz groups. Groups should number between 2 and 6, depending on the size of the group. This part of the workshop will last 30 – 40 minutes.
2. Buzz-group members will focus specifically on the carols in Sections #2 – #7 in the classroom lesson plan.
3. A member of each group will read the introduction to the first carol aloud.
4. Group members will work together to identify two or three teaching methods. The teachers may refer to the handout, "Classroom Teaching Methods" to assist them in this task.
5. The teachers will examine the sheet music for the carol. How does the composer use the melody to express the emotions of the biblical people? Are the upward and downward movements of musical notes subtle, or dramatic?
6. The group will move to the next carol. This three-step process will be followed for all five carols and the dialog.

For The Teacher-Trainer

Buzz-Group Guidelines

During the buzz-group session, circulate and offer nominal assistance.

The aim for this segment of the Christmas story workshop is to involve your teachers-in-training in a struggle with the content of the lesson plan. Do not offer any information about teaching methods beyond what is on their list. Struggling demands that something come from within the participant. A bit of frustration will arouse teachers' curiosity and increase their involvement in the workshop.

Return to the large group.

If some of the groups did not finish, no problem. The whole group will work together on the remaining carols.

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #2

Using the list of Classroom Teaching Methods, buzz group members might have identified the following teaching methods:

Guided imagination is used to place the students in the scene.

Historical context is provided through the Composer's Story.

Emotions are educated when students sing with the shepherds.

Music appreciation techniques are identified.

Storytelling techniques: the first five Elements Of A Scene are described.

- 1) Describe the place
- 2) Name the hero
- 3) Tag the hero (clothing, attitude, etc.)
- 4) Start the action
- 5) Introduce an opposing force

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan.

Do You Hear What I Hear? guides our imaginations with the description of the imaginary journey from the classroom to the field outside Bethlehem. Upon arrival we are given visual and auditory images, such as sitting on a rock, surrounded by sleeping shepherds, and listening to the faint sound of singing voices.

Our emotions are educated as we are led to feel curious and to wonder what will happen during this mysterious adventure. In a few minutes, as we sing this carol together, we will absorb the emotions of the shepherds.

The musical score draws our attention the way the composer used dramatic rising and falling notes to express feelings of excitement, expectation, joy, etc.

(Ask if there are any musicians in the workshop group. What other musical techniques does the composer use to convey the feelings of the shepherds?)

Discuss *The Elements Of A Scene*. (handout)

Scene building is an important skill for a Storyteller because stories are presented as a scene or series of scenes. Whenever we teachers decide to use the storytelling method, it is best to follow the formula for creating the Elements of A Scene. Storytellers have been using this formula for thousands of years because it ensures that enough information is included for the audience to visualize what is happening in the story.

The story of the night of Jesus' birth is told in two scenes. The first one takes place in a field outside Bethlehem. The second scene takes place in the cave where Jesus was born.

In the Christmas Story Sing-Along, this carol helps create the field scene. This portion of the lesson plan contains the first five Elements Of A Scene.

1) Describe the place.

We are asked to imagine the setting: just over 2000 years ago, in a field outside Bethlehem. The description is evocative of a camera that slowly brings the scene into focus. We become time travelers, zooming in from our far-away classroom to a close-up of the rocks and the sleeping shepherds.

We are invited to use our imaginations to become part of that history-making scene, and now we are set up for a you-are-there Christmas story experience. Through its use of word pictures, the lesson plan achieves what is commonly done in time-travel movies.

2) Name the hero.

That's you, sitting with the group of shepherds. Since the Christmas story will unfold through the students' point of view, *we* are cast as the hero.

3) Tag the hero.

A "tag" is some form of identification, usually (but not always) a physical feature. In this case, our tag is our attitude: curiosity. We are feeling curious and wondering.

4) Start the action with dialog.

The shepherds are the speakers. They question each other. This action makes the characters in the Christmas story come alive because they think, they speak and they act.

5) *Introduce an opposing force.*

The opposing force is our unanswered questions. This creates suspense.

Activity: sing along with *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

The lyrics of this song do not end the scene. They take us just far enough to be attentive to the opposing force, our unanswered questions. The field scene continues in the next carol.

Hark, The Herald Angels Sing

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #3

Again, invite your teachers-in-training to name the teaching methods and music appreciation techniques they found in the introduction to this Christmas carol.

The transition sentence guides our vision.

Guided imagination continues as more word pictures are painted.

Historical context is provided through the Composer's Story.

Mood control is demonstrated.

Music appreciation techniques are used.

Find synonyms to help students understand unusual words.

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan.

Transitioning smoothly from one section of a lesson plan to another is an important teaching method. It keeps students tuned in to the part of the story we are teaching. The transition sentence used to introduce this Christmas carol is,

"Heaven opens, and now we see clearly."

This statement shifts our gaze and guides the focus of our imaginations. We look away from the other shepherds to the approaching choir of angels. As we move through the Christmas story lesson plan, notice how frequently we must refocus students' attention in order to keep everyone in the class on the same page.

Finding synonyms is a teaching method that causes students to struggle with the text. It engages them. Ask your teachers-in-training to think of other words for "hark," and "herald," and experience the effectiveness of this teaching method.

Activity: Sing along with *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing*.

This carol does not end the scene. It is just a simple song that moves the action along. The shepherds are still speaking to each other.

Joy To The World

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #4

Invite your teachers to describe the teaching methods and music appreciation techniques they found.

Historical context is provided through the Composer's Story.

Exciting words and imagery are used in the Christmas carol.

Storytelling techniques: the final two Elements Of A Scene are described.

- 7) Resolve the conflict
- 8) Close the scene

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan.

If ever there were a Christmas carol that can be described as "robust," this is it. *Joy To The World* is such a dynamic song, the best—perhaps only—teaching method is to use exiting words to talk about it. When teachers speak to students the words: "...escalating excitement in heaven ...great triumphal sounds ...proclaim Joy ...rejoice ...the angels' exhilaration," they must speak them *dynamically* and use gestures whenever possible.

(Here, the Workshop Leader might invite a participant to stand and demonstrate a dynamic way of projecting these words in a classroom environment.)

For this moment in the Christmas story, the lesson plan employs the final two Elements Of A Scene.

- 7) Resolve the conflict.

The angels are the speakers and they resolve the shepherds' unanswered questions. These are *real* angels, and they have come bearing an important message: a child destined to be the Messiah has just been born!

8) Close the scene.

As this scene in the Christmas story lesson concludes, we must describe how the experience affects the biblical characters. They must *do* something. In this case, after listening to the angels' message, the shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem and find the newborn king.

Activity: Sing along with *Joy To The World*.

The Joseph And Mary Dialog

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #5

Invite your teachers to describe the teaching methods they found.

A transition sentence transports us from the field scene to the cave scene.

Dramatization makes Mary and Joseph come alive.

Mood control is achieved through use of quiet words.

Storytelling techniques: the first four Elements Of A Scene are described.

- 1) Describe the place (a cave)
- 2) Name the hero (Mary and Joseph)
- 3) Tag the hero (a reverent attitude)
- 4) Start the action with a dialog

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan

(If the Workshop Leader chooses to dramatize the dialog, make sure everyone has a copy of Part II: 'Dramatizing The Christmas Story In The Classroom')

The Dialog is especially important, because it makes Mary and Joseph come alive. They think. They speak. They act. Their dialog helps us distinguish their personalities.

Mary speaks enthusiastically, like the 14-year-old girl she is. Joseph her husband, calms Mary as an older man might do.

Activity: Perform the *Joseph And Mary Dialogue*. (Handout)

What Child Is This?

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #6

Invite your teachers to describe the teaching methods and music appreciation techniques they found.

A transition sentence takes us to the composer's bedroom.

Our imagination is guided by dramatic sensory images.

Historical context is provided through the Composer's Story.

Mood control is maintained through the lullaby.

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan.

The scene begins with the Composer's Story, which is especially interesting because of his near-death experience. This mystical account of William Dix's experience makes us wonder: Did Dix meet Christ? Did he receive a mission from the Lord?

The visual images presented in the bedroom scene are: "...a gloomy bedroom in Scotland ...a sick young man ...reading his bible ...in a coma ...he recovers."

Back in the cave, the shepherds, along with Joseph and Mary, are wondering about something else. How can this child—with such humble beginnings—be the child whom the angels called: Savior, Lord, and the Messiah?

These men were not prepared for the vast difference between what they expected to find in Bethlehem and what they discovered in the cave. The shepherds were anticipating a glorious event in Bethlehem, something so amazing it was beyond their imagination.

Instead, they find a baby who belongs to a family with no status.

It is the shepherds' awesome reaction that delivers the powerful message of this scene in the Christmas story classroom lesson. The men were not disappointed, because they knew something incredible was happening. The shepherds were content to let God do things His way. This was a triumph of faith.

At this point in the Christmas story, all they can do is wonder, *what child is this?* The carol evokes a sense of peaceful wonderment. The music and lyrics convey awed admiration.

Activity: Sing along with *What Child Is This?*

We Three Kings Of Orient Are

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #7

Ask teachers to describe the teaching methods and music appreciation techniques they found.

Historical context is provided through the Composer's Story.

Mood control is accomplished through a calm transition.

Attention is refocused to the Wise Men as they arrive.

Sensory experiences and **music appreciation** techniques are combined in the Christmas carol.

Leader's Commentary

Discuss the teaching methods used in the lesson plan.

The Wise Men pose a problem. They are full of enthusiasm, talking excitedly, and impatient to finally behold the object of their long journey. If there were no calm transition from the peacefulness of the lullaby to their high-spirited entry, the quick change in mood might disturb our students.

Stalling for time is not an official teaching method, nevertheless it functions well here. The Wise Teacher delays the arrival of the rambunctious Wise Men by talking about them for a moment in order to slowly elevate the mood in the classroom. He or she describes their interpretation of the Star of Bethlehem.

When the Wise Men arrive, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds are surprised. Never have they stood so near to royalty. These strangers are so elegant! But the Wise Men set them at ease. They are a sociable bunch, eager to present their gifts and tell the tale of their long journey.

As we sing this lively Christmas carol, we enjoy swaying from side to side, imagining ourselves bouncing along on a camel. The whimsical mood of this carol is an aside. The overall mood we hope to convey to our students is a combination of amazement at the miraculous birth, and a profound sense of reverence for this divine infant.

Activity: Sing along with *We Three Kings of Orient Are*.

Final Commentary

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story | Section #8

A lecture is the best teaching method to use to end the sing-along Christmas story because it meets the needs of our students. When they leave the classroom, students want to have a clear idea of what they learned and why it is important.

The teacher must address this need with a good, short summary.

When all of the characters in the Christmas story are onstage and the last carol is sung, teachers and students are ready for the grand finale: to learn the meaning of this entire, incredible event.

(Quote the Storyteller's summary from the Classroom Lesson Plan Section #8, 'Classroom Instruction')

Reflection Questions

1. Do you agree/disagree that group singing energizes students?
2. Did the sing-along teaching method help you become part of the story?
3. Do you feel that your experience while singing the carols was enhanced by learning the Composer's Story?
4. Did the buzz groups improve your experience in the workshop? How?
5. Which teaching method do you use best? Which would you like to improve?
6. Can you suggest any improvements to this workshop, or to the lesson plan?

Footnotes

* Campbell, Don and Doman, Alex, *Healing At The Speed of Sound*, Hudson St. Press, 2011, p.156.

Sources

Collins, Ace, *Stories Behind The Best Loved Songs of Christmas*.
This small book is available from [Amazon](#).

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Part I • Classroom Lesson Plan

Part I: Classroom Lesson Plan. We will also use this lesson plan for the demonstration lesson when we do the teacher-training workshop.

Part II: List of properties and preparations for dramatizing the Christmas Story classroom lesson, if the teacher wishes to do this (it is optional.)

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story

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Part I • Classroom Lesson Plan

When teaching the Christmas story, asking students to sing along with popular carols captivates the entire class with the joy of that long ago night. We are drawn into one of the most important events in the history of the world, the moment the Divine became human. Each carol and story gives our spiritual ancestors: the shepherds–Mary, Joseph, and the Wise Men—a delightful way to reach out and touch us. The music connects our hearts to their hearts. The stories connect our minds to their minds, and we have a you-are-there experience.

This lesson plan for *Teaching The Christmas Story* is structured as a sing-along, and includes dramatization. Experienced teachers will enjoy staging the drama. But, some of the less experienced teachers may take a more simple approach. No problem. The Christmas story can easily be taught with none of the drama. Just ignore the Staging Directions.

- Minimum requirements: Storyteller(s), bibles, copies of lyrics and sheet music* for students, and a song leader, which your church can easily supply.
- If the classroom lesson must be shortened, eliminate the Composer's Stories from the script.

There are many versions of each carol. Some include verses that refer to the sufferings and Resurrection of Jesus. Since Holy Week events are not part of the Christmas story, I recommend those verses be avoided. It is best to teach one event at a time.

Choose your actors. Tell them they will remain part of the class until their moment for acting comes. You, the teacher, are the Director and primary Storyteller. The front of your classroom is the stage.

- Seat Mary (holding the infant Jesus) and Joseph center front.
- Seat the Shepherds in a side aisle.
- Seat the Wise Men in the other side aisle.

** Please refer to Part II for details relating to music, staging and props. To avoid copyright issues, I leave supplying sheet music to you or your teaching staff.*

1. Introduce the Christmas Story classroom lesson.

Storyteller

Christmas is the happiest time of the year. This celebration opens our hearts. We smile a lot. We are more affectionate with our loved ones. We are more generous toward the poor.

Why all this joy?

We are celebrating the moment God entered into human history as a living person on the night of Jesus' birth.

Today, we will sing the Christmas carols that tell the story of that long ago night. As we sing and perform the Christmas story, the music will open our imaginations. In our minds, we will travel back across the centuries and connect with our spiritual ancestors.

2. Introduce the next Sing-Along: *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

Storyteller

Our first sing-along takes us to the first moments of the Christmas story.

Imagine the setting. It is just over 2000 years ago, in a field outside Bethlehem. A group of shepherds is gathered around a campfire. The sheep are bedded down for the night and everyone is sleeping.

Now imagine you are sitting on a large rock next to a shepherd boy cradling a baby lamb in his arms. You are feeling curious. You are wondering what will happen during this mysterious adventure into such an ancient time. Soon, you hear a faint, strange sound. You listen carefully. Is someone singing?

The beautiful music grows louder. The shepherds awaken. The song seems to be coming from a path of light beaming down from the sky. You strain to see more clearly. Is that an enormous angel approaching you? Behind the angel, in the distance, is that a choir of angels following him? Can you believe what you are seeing? What is the angel saying?

Composer's Story

In 1962, Noël Regney and Gloria Shayne were asked to write a Christmas song for a concert group. As Noel considered it, his thoughts turned to the night the Prince of Peace was born, and to the message of the announcing angels:

“Glory to God in the highest and Peace to His People on earth.”

He imagined the shepherds’ response to the angels and wrote a poem describing their sense of wonder. This Christmas story sing-along is cast as a dialog between a shepherd boy and a shepherd man (or lamb). The boy is extremely excited and full of questions.

Gloria Shayne set Noel's poem to music, and presented the world with a new Christmas carol, *Do You Hear What I Hear?*

Classroom Instruction:

This carol teaches the Christmas story in both words and feelings. Look at the sheet music and notice all the upward notes. They express the shepherds’ excitement and confusion. During our sing-along, the upward notes will make us feel as the shepherds felt: surprised, confused, and full of wonder.

While we sing along with *Do You Hear What I Hear*, continue to imagine you are sitting with the shepherds. Look around at the others. Everyone is asking questions. Each person is wondering, "Are the others hearing what I’m hearing? Am I dreaming?"

Activity: *Sing along with, Do You Hear What I Hear?*

3. Introduce the next Sing-Along: *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing.*

Storyteller

The music in our Christmas story becomes more excited. Heaven opens and now we see clearly. Yes, it definitely is a vast choir of angels, moving along the starlight path toward us. The angels are bursting with enthusiasm as they announce the birth of the Savior.

“Glory to the newborn king!”

The old, English carol, *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*, helps us share the amazement of the shepherds as they tell each other what the angels are saying.

Composer's Story

Hark the Herald Angels Sing was written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, brother of the founder of the Methodist Church. 100 years later, Felix Mendelssohn revised the music to emphasize the feeling of the great announcement.

As we continue our sing along of the Christmas story, notice how the sound of the rising notes gets louder and louder. The words are fast, clear, clipped. The music is demanding us to wake up and pay attention!

Classroom Instruction:

Review with your class the unusual words in the second verse, if necessary. Ask students: What are some other words for "hark"? (I like "Listen-up, you mortals!") What is another word for "herald"?

Activity: *Sing along with the first two verses of Hark, The Herald Angels Sing.*

4. Introduce the next Sing-Along: *Joy To The World*.

Composer's Story

Isaac Watts, another English preacher who lived in England during the same century as Charles Wesley, was drawn to the meaning of the angels' message. In his carol, *Joy To The World*, he gave voice to the intensity of the escalating excitement in heaven. At this point in the Christmas story, after centuries and centuries of waiting, the angels can at last announce the birth of the Savior!

At the time Isaac's carol was composed, church music had to be soft and monotonous. This was virtually a law. The rebellious, young Isaac Watts found it so boring, he complained to his father. Dad listened, and suggested Isaac write something better.

Thank you, Dad!

Among the 600 hymns Isaac Watts composed, we find *Joy To The World*, one of the most popular Christmas carols of all time.

Storyteller

With great, triumphal sounds, the angels proclaim that JOY has come to the world in person (John 15:11). They use extravagant words to describe him: King, Messiah, Savior, and they proclaim He will rule the world with truth and grace. This gift from God is so wonderful the angels call for all earth to rejoice. An over abundance of high notes carry us into the angels' exhilaration.

For a few moments, let us sing with the angel choir. Like them, we are calling to earth. Sing loudly! Share their excitement!

Activity: *Sing along with Joy To The World.*

Classroom Instruction:

The angel's song was so forceful, the shepherds decide to go to Bethlehem to find the newborn king.

5. Introduce the Joseph And Mary Dialog.

Storyteller

Now the Christmas story moves to the cave in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. The cave is dimly lit with just a few candles. The couple is admiring their newborn baby. What mixed emotions they must feel! It is not difficult to imagine what they said to each other.

The conversation reveals each character's personality. Joseph speaks like an older man, and Mary, more like a teenage girl.

Activity: *Perform the Joseph And Mary Dialog.*

(From their position at stage center, Joseph and Mary stand. Mary holds the infant Jesus, a doll, wrapped in a blanket in her arms.)

Mary

I wrapped him in so many blankets. Can you see him, Joseph?

(Mary tilts the baby up.)

Joseph

He is very handsome.

Mary

I keep wondering about him. Do you think he is an angel?

Joseph

He looks like a little boy to me. Tell me again: What did the angel, Gabriel, say to you?

Mary

I remember the words exactly. But, I still don't understand them. He said:

You will give birth to a son.

The Lord will make him a king.

And, his kingdom will never end.

Joseph

The angel came to me in a dream. He spoke to me about you. He said: "Mary will have a son, and you will name him Jesus."

Mary

Imagine! Our son, a king! I think he will be a new kind of king. Maybe he will be—

Joseph

(Interrupts) Oh, Mary, be patient. Right now he is just a tiny baby, *our* baby. I don't know what plan God has for him, but, whatever it is, it's a long time from now. For a while, let's just enjoy him.

Mary

Look at his eyes. He is watching us. I think he understands everything we say.

(Joseph and Mary sit.)

6. Introduce the next Sing-Along: *What Child Is This?*

Composer's Story

Now, our Christmas story takes us to the home of the composer of *What Child Is This?* The year is 1865, and we enter a gloomy bedroom in Scotland. We see a very sick young man who has spent months in bed. He is slowly dying. His only comfort comes from the many hours he spends each day reading his bible. Finally, he slips into a coma. Then, something unexpected happens.

He recovers. We don't have the details, but later, when he was well, William Dix described a near-death experience. He must have met Christ and been given a mission, because he returned to health filled with an abundance of spiritual energy. After this experience the lyrics for some of our most popular hymns just burst out of his imagination.

Dix was so enchanted by the shepherds' role in the Christmas story that he wrote a poem that described their journey from bewilderment to full insight.

The poem became a Christmas carol when it was set to the haunting, soulful tune of *Green Sleeves*, a popular English folk song. Today, we know this carol as, *What Child Is This?*

Classroom Instruction:

Ask students to return to the cave in their imaginations. They see the shepherds arrive, still excited by their experience with the angels. After their miraculous encounter with the angels, they do not know what to expect. Surely, it is something so great it is beyond their imagination. Suddenly, when they see the baby, they stop.

(Shepherds arrive and stop eight feet from Mary and Joseph.)

Storyteller

The shepherds are astonished at the sight of a poorly dressed man sitting in a cow barn next to a poorly dressed young woman holding a sleeping child.

None of them know what to make of the infant. The angels announced the birth of the Messiah. But, this child and his parents are obviously poor "nobodies." Nevertheless, the shepherds have faith. Something humongous is happening here, but what? Who is this child? They greet the infant Jesus with reverence.

We join the group of shepherds as they begin to sing. With them, we express our feelings of wonder and our care for the child through the long, slow notes of a soothing lullaby.

Activity: *Sing along with, What Child Is This?*

7. Introduce the final Sing-Along: *We Three Kings Of Orient Are.*

(The Three Kings enter the cave and stop about eight feet from Mary and Joseph. Each King carries his gift.)

Storyteller

In his gospel, St. Matthew describes the visit of three astrologers from the East, probably Persia. They were known as Wise Men, because they were advisors to their

king. They correctly interpreted the meaning of the strange behavior of the planets. They had seen a new star, brighter than any ever known. The star had appeared in the constellation Pisces, a group of stars formed in the shape of a fish that hovered over Palestine, the House of the Jews. Since they believed the star would lead them to the birthplace of a king from heaven, The Wise Men journeyed to Bethlehem to pay honor to him.

Imagine the surprise felt by the shepherds and Mary and Joseph when these three richly dressed strangers entered the cave. Who were they? Why had such wealthy men come to this lowly place?

Composer's Story

A young minister, Henry Hopkins, Jr., captured this moment in the Christmas story when he composed the light-hearted carol, *We Three Kings Of Orient Are*. It was 1857 in America, a time when our American Christmas traditions were just being born. This jolly carol was Henry's Epiphany gift for his little nieces and nephews.

In the first verse of *We Three Kings*, the Wise Men, who are the speakers in this carol, introduce themselves. They have brought gifts to honor the newborn King. (This is the reason gift-giving remains an important part of our Christmas tradition today.)

No other Christmas carol portrays a more beautiful picture of the Star Of Bethlehem than that sung by the Wise Men in the first Refrain. In the next three verses, each Wise Man names his gift and explains what it symbolizes.

In the last verse, the three join their voices in praise to the Lord, looking forward to His great deeds.

Classroom Instruction:

(One by one, when the appropriate verse is sung, each Wise Man approaches the infant Jesus, presents his gift, and steps back.)

It is the bouncy music of this carol that is especially delightful. The music tells us how they feel about the long months of riding on camels to reach this remote country.

As we sing along with the Christmas story, imagine you are riding your camel along with the Wise Men. The bumpy music pulls you into the motions of your camel. You find yourself swaying from side to side. The length of the journey is impressed on you by the length of the words as they are dragged out: "Weeee Three Kiiiiings of Orrrrient Arrrrre."

Activity: Sing along with *We Three Kings of Orient Are*.

Teacher: Lead the swaying motion of the camel.

8. Explain the meaning of the manger scene.

Storyteller

Now, in the “cave” at the front of our room, we have all the people who gathered around Jesus on the night of his birth.

It is not by accident that they are so different from each other. Under normal circumstances they would never meet. But, on this night, each was a symbol of something larger than them.

The Shepherds were men who did not attend the Sabbath worship services. This was because they could not leave their sheep unattended. Nevertheless, their absence was seen as shameful, so they were looked down upon. The shepherds stand for all the outcasts in the world.

The Three Wise Men are a complicated lot. They are rich. They are Gentiles and a mixture of races. Their presence tells us that Jesus came to save not just one people, but all the people in the whole world.

Mary and Joseph represent the faithful Jews and the poor.

Classroom Instruction:

Often, in today’s world, the different kinds of people we see in the manger scene are fighting with each other. So, the message of Jesus’ birth is plain: everyone is invited to come together to worship the Prince of Peace. Those who accept His invitation are taken into Christ’s love, where feelings of hostility fade as JOY flows into their hearts (John 15:11).

Let it be so with us.

9. Reflection Questions

The mood created while teaching the Christmas story sing-along will leave your class feeling mellow. To preserve this mood, the usual, analytical style of questions should be set aside. A conversational tone is more appropriate. Use the following gentle questions to invite your students to share their experiences and beliefs about Christmas.

- How does your family celebrate Christmas?
- Do any of your decorations illustrate parts of the Christmas story?
- Aside from the exchange of gifts, what do you like best about Christmas?
- Were you surprised that God entered His human life as the son of a couple of modest means?
- What is the basic message of the Christmas story?
(The Christ child invites us to open our hearts to the Divine Love and Joy he brings into the world and to share it with others.)

10. Concluding Activity

Distribute bibles. It is important that students know that the Christmas story comes from the bible.

Ask students to take turns reading the verses from Luke 2:8-20, and Matthew 1:8 to 2:12. For easy reading, use the Good News Bible.

Sing-Along: Teaching The Christmas Story

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Part II • Directions For Dramatizing The Lesson

1. Christmas Carols / Hymns

- *Do You Hear What I Hear?*
- *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing*
- *Joy To The World*
- *What Child Is This?*
- *We Three Kings Of Orient Are*

2. People And Roles

- Teacher/Director
- Song leader--it is easiest for students to sing along with an alto or tenor.
- Storyteller(s)–the teacher may wish to perform this role, and/or assign Storyteller and Composer's Stories to different students.
- Two to five Shepherds
- Three Wise Men
- Mary and Joseph

3. Props, Equipment, Handouts

- An instrument (optional): piano, guitar, or a CD/MP3 player, etc. to play the Christmas carols
- Copies of the sheet music and/or lyrics FOR ALL
- Copies of the Joseph and Mary Dialog for Joseph and Mary
- A staff for each Shepherd (broomsticks?)
- Two robes (choir robes?) for Joseph and Mary
- Infant Jesus doll
- Blanket for Jesus
- Gift box for each Wise Man

4. Staging Instructions

- The front of the classroom is the "cave."
- Seat Joseph with Mary (holding infant Jesus) at stage center.
- Seat shepherds along a side aisle.
- Seat Wise Men along the other side aisle.
- Use masking tape to mark the stage floor eight feet away on both sides of Joseph and Mary. This will prevent Shepherds and Wise Men from crowding center stage.

Script: The Joseph And Mary Dialog

(From their position at stage center, Joseph and Mary stand. Mary holds the infant Jesus, a doll, wrapped in a blanket in her arms. The conversation reveals each character's personality. Mary speaks enthusiastically, like the 14-year-old girl she is. Joseph her husband, calms Mary as an older man might do.)

Mary

I wrapped him in so many blankets. Can you see him, Joseph?

(Mary tilts the baby up.)

Joseph

He is very handsome.

Mary

I keep wondering about him. Do you think he is an angel?

Joseph

He looks like a little boy to me. Tell me again: What did the angel, Gabriel, say to you?

Mary

I remember the words exactly. But, I still don't understand them. He said:

You will give birth to a son.

The Lord will make him a king.

And, his kingdom will never end.

Joseph

The angel came to me in a dream. He spoke to me about you. He said: "Mary will have a son, and you will name him Jesus."

Mary

Imagine! Our son, a king! I think he will be a new kind of king. Maybe he will be—

Joseph

(Interrupts) Oh, Mary, be patient. Right now he is just a tiny baby, *our* baby. I don't know what plan God has for him, but, whatever it is, it's a long time from now. For a while, let's just enjoy him.

Mary

Look at his eyes. He is watching us. I think he understands everything we say.

(Joseph and Mary sit.)

Classroom Teaching Methods

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1. Arrange for your students to struggle with the material.
 - *Form into buzz groups.*
 - *Ask questions.*
 - *Dramatize. Ask for illustrations, such as drawing or role-playing.*
2. Choose the best teaching method for each subject.
3. Conclude the lesson. Summarize the meaning of the lesson.
4. Educate your students' emotions.
5. Provide sensory experiences: visual, auditory or touch.
6. Ask students to find synonyms for unusual words.
7. Guide your students' imagination.
8. Lecture.
9. Invite discussion.
10. Refocus attention periodically.
11. Show an excerpt from a popular film.
12. Transition smoothly from one part of the lesson to the next.
13. Use exciting words and imagery.
14. Provide historical context.
15. Use mood control techniques.
16. Use storytelling techniques. Include all eight Elements of A Scene:
 1. *Describe the place.*
 2. *Name the hero.*
 3. *Tag the hero (clothing, attitude, etc.)*
 4. *Start the action. Use dialog.*
 5. *Introduce a villain or an opposing force.*
 6. *Establish conflict. Use dialog.*
 7. *Resolve the conflict.*
 8. *Close the scene. Describe how the hero feels about what happened. Or, show what the hero does in response to what happened.*

17. Use music appreciation techniques.

- *Provide historical context. Tell why the composer wrote the song.*
- *With regard to the lyrics, identify the speaker(s). Who is speaking to whom? Monolog? Dialog? Clarify unfamiliar words.*
- *Explain how the musical notes express the emotion(s) of the song.*

Improve your teaching skills with effective teaching methods!



As you read through this list of classroom teaching methods, you will recognize some that you use often. You just have not named them. Naming elevates awareness of what you are doing. You begin to study them. You wonder: when do you use these teaching methods? How well do they work? You will understand your own methods better and apply them far more skillfully. Some of these classroom teaching methods may be new for you. As you learn how and when to use them, you will become a better teacher because you will reach more students. “Different strokes for different folks” is as true in the classroom as it is in the larger world.

