

Children at the Well

Teacher Workshops

The three teacher workshops were interfaith in nature. Many of the teachers we spoke to expressed a strong interest in having them organized that way. We encountered many problems with scheduling convenient times to accommodate teachers from two private schools and five or so religious education programs. However, we decided that, that in keeping with the intent of the larger project, the teacher workshops must involve teachers of different faiths.

There were twenty-nine teachers from the Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Muslim faiths who attended the workshops. Some teachers came each time, others only attended when we visited their community. One was held (during the week, in the late afternoon) at a private school, one (on Sunday) at a Jewish religious education conference that drew teachers from many synagogues and temples, and the last was held on a Sunday, at the Hindu temple, when their religious instruction class was over. The students' coaching sessions were held at the Muslim school.

This arrangement allowed us a glimpse of the various teacher / student classroom environments and in some cases, their sacred spaces. It also made attendance more convenient and served as a sign of honor and respect for each tradition.

The workshops were “hands on” and interactive in nature, with a strong emphasis on story sharing. Much of the teaching took place through telling. Teachers were provided with numerous handouts, exercises, practical tips and resources that they could use during the school year. The first two workshops were designed to introduce teachers to the power and value of employing stories in their classrooms and giving them the tools to begin doing so.

Because we found the teachers to be such a gifted and creative group, the third workshop was designed to have 4 of the teachers share ways in which they already used story in their teaching. It was a wonderful session; one that we would strongly consider for future workshops.

Workshop topics included, but were not limited to the following:

(note: SH= sharing, H= handout)

GETTING ACQUAINTED:

- Learning the background of participants / introductions / expectations (H, SH)
- One thing you already know about story; One thing you would like to know (SH)
- Role of story in your religious tradition (narrative vs legalistic approach) (SH)
- Guidelines for sharing stories with people of other faiths (SH)
- Unearthing the storyteller in each of us: sharing through story prompts and modeling a non- critical appreciation of tellings (H, SH)
- Guidelines for Student Nominations, student letters, and tips for supporting student tellers (H)
- Calendar dates for project coaching sessions and events/ garnering support for the student community telling

BRINGING YOUR LESSONS “TO LIFE” WITH STORY:

- The complementarities of the characteristics of youth and the characteristics of story (H, SH)
- Helping Students to get the Most out of Stories, (Johnson, G., Connect newsletter article, St. Mary’s Press,) (H)
- Question guide for reflecting on stories (H, ST, SH)

WHY STORY IN THE RELIGION CLASSROOM?

- Focus on teachers (H)
- Focus on students (H)
- Considerations/ tips (2 H)

TIPS FOR LEARNING AND TELLING A STORY:

- A “sharing / gifting” rather than a “performance” approach
- Practical guidelines (H)
- Encouraging students to tell
- Story Prompts related to students’ age level, your text topics / year’s themes (SH, H)
- Adapting a non-critical coaching response to student tellings (H)

FAITH-BASED/ INTERFAITH STORY RESOURCES: (numerous Hs)

Books, articles, websites, local story circles, national NSN resources (Healing Story Alliance and NSN Interfaith Discussion Group (websites and listservs))

Workshop leader Gert Johnson chose stories from the following list to tell during workshops. If you would like copies and/or sources for these stories, you can contact Gert at grsjohnson@aol.com

- Truth and Parable, Hitting the Bull's Eye, How the Temple Site was Chosen, The Gossip (Jewish)
- The Rich Sultan, Stories of Nasrudin, The Prayer Rug (Muslim, Sufi)
- The Blind Men and the Elephant, How Night Came Into Being (Hindu)
- God Was There! Jesus and the Children, The Teacher Who Bowed, The Light Within (Christian)
- Herman and the Mirror of Truth (Interfaith)

Ideas for Future Workshops:

- Meet more informally, using the teachers themselves as story leaders, as we did in the third workshop listed above.
- Try to schedule a time when our storycoaches can attend, perhaps even lead at least one session. This was difficult to do last time because Sunday turned out to be the most convenient day for both coaching and teacher meetings.