

Engaging Today's Kids

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The challenge of "getting kids engaged" is such a significant challenge! It is the same challenge that Jesus faced when He was here in person! He showed us how to do it. He used objects, stories, surprising statements, and different locations! He very rarely taught in the temple!

It is becoming more difficult to "engage" children or youth! They are all "de-sensitized" by the electronic world. What "worked" years ago is viewed as boring today! We, in children's ministry (CM) have to be very vigilant in engaging today's kids!

The Common Factors In Engaging Kids

Every child is different, and yet every child is the same! They all need and enjoy some common factors. These factors increase their interest, their attention and their retention of the lesson.



1. Personal attention – not to class, to individuals
2. Friendliness – using eyes, hands, voice, smile, words (affirmation, interest)
3. Comfortable pace – not hurried to “get through the lesson” (gives impression of not being focused on individual)
4. “Being real” – honest about feelings, fears, mistakes, joys, hopes, etc. No “teacher face” – “Come in, sit down, and listen!”
5. Listening to / interested in their ideas, feelings, thoughts, fears, etc.
6. Creative investment into the “lesson” or activity – they notice and appreciate it!

What's In Your Hand?

Just as God challenged Moses to “throw down” his staff, He is challenging you to consider what is “in your hand.” God can use whatever you “throw down” for Him to use.



1. The parking lot
2. The entrance to the church building
3. The hallway
4. The CM classroom or ministry area door
5. The CM classroom or ministry area room
6. Your personal eye contact
7. Your lesson plan
8. Your personal interaction
9. The visual object lessons you create
10. The stories you tell
11. The children's questions or experiences

Earning The Right To Be Heard

Today's children don't naturally respect someone who takes on the role of “teacher.” This person must earn the right to be heard and respected by them. Jesus was a master at doing this. He came to His world, not only as a “teacher,” but also as someone who understood their needs, fears, and frustrations.



1. “Translating” the scripture passage/lesson into their worlds
 - a. Farmers – Parable of Sower
 - b. Fishermen – Fishers of men
 - c. Woman at well – Thirst no more
 - d. Understand truth / understand audience = “translate” into terminology (user friendly, useful)

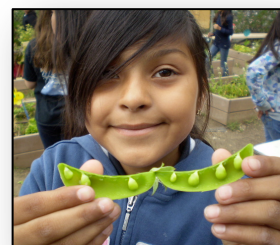
2. Becoming “salt” to kids who don’t know they’re thirsty and shed “light” on something they have never considered.
 - a. Pose questions or problems
 - b. Express their questions for them
 - c. Identify the challenges and “impossibilities”
 - d. Using or referring to their terminology, daily activities, fears, desires, hopes, food, etc.
 - e. Be real – laugh, joke, play with them! (the story of Eric)



Understand The Students

It has been years since you were a child. It is safe to say that your “world” as a child bears little resemblance to the “world” that today’s children experience. In order to communicate to them, you have to understand them! In order to understand them, you have to observe and listen to them. The more you “become as little children,” the easier it will be for you to teach them. Here are characteristics of kids today:

1. Glad to “escape” from class!
2. Sent by parents.
3. May be interested in the Bible.
4. Not “bubble kids”!
5. Want to have fun and laugh!
6. Want to be thrilled!
7. Want to be surprised!
8. Crave personal attention!
9. Want to do something meaningful
10. Want to interact with others!
11. May have emotional scars.



Increasing The Impact of The Lesson

No matter how “amazing” our lesson may be, if we don’t give the children some specific ways to apply the lesson, the children might be “bored.” Here are some ways to make the lesson interesting:

1. Making the lesson interesting (ABADDI)
 - a. **Apply** – Apply the lesson to their present lives.
 - b. **Build** – Build bridges between “Bible times” and recess.
 - c. **Answer** – Answer the “What’s in it for me?” question – friends, popularity, happiness, the joy of pleasing God, etc.
 - d. **Demonstrate** – Use object lessons! Visuals, messy, surprising, intriguing, dangerous, etc.
 - e. **Discover** – Let the kids discover the lesson for themselves – NO LECTURES!
 - f. **Interact** – Let the kids interact and personalize the learning.
2. Determine the objective for the lesson.
 - a. What do you want to accomplish in 50 minutes?
 - b. What vital information is “hidden” in the lesson or scripture, just waiting to be discovered?
 - c. What do you want them to learn or apply?
 - d. How are they better prepared to make Godly choices or how is their personal relationship with God stronger as a result of these 50 minutes?
 - e. When the kids are walking away, they turn to each other and say, “I’m so glad I experienced this class, because now I _____.”



3. Prepare the room!
 - a. Sounds
 - b. Smells
 - c. Unusual items
 - d. Unusual set up
 - e. Something visual
4. Connect with them on the walk to the bus.
 - a. Prepare them for the lesson.
 - b. Ask lesson-related questions.
 - c. Make lesson-related observations or comments.
 - d. “Whet their appetite” for the lesson.



Capture The Students’ Attention In The Room

1. Effective techniques
 - e. Use the element of surprise
 - f. Something visual
 - g. A “shocking” or unusual statement
 - h. Mysterious voice
 - i. Something “secret”
 - j. An object lesson or science experiment
 - k. An interesting or funny story
 - l. A video clip
 - m. A song clip
 - n. “Back door” technique
2. Add some “sauce” to the lesson
 - a. The lesson might be like “white rice”
 - b. Real Life Stories And Illustrations
 - c. Pictures And Object Lessons
 - d. Drama or “Back Door” Examples
 - e. Sounds or Songs



Let Them Discover

1. Studies prove that letting the learners discover the learning enhances interest and retention up to 90%!
2. Get them talking and discovering!
 - a. Brainstorms
 - b. Debates
 - c. Role-plays
 - d. Team competitions
 - e. Discussions (lg./sm. group)
 - f. Interviews
 - g. Re-enactments
 - h. Scripture searches
 - i. Mock witnessing
 - j. “What would God say?”

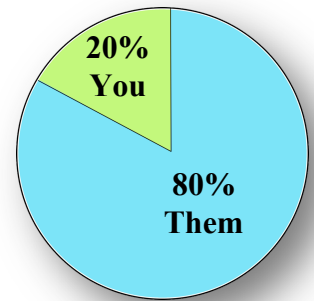


3. The “80/20 Rule”

- a. 80% of the talk and activity is from the students
- b. 20% is from the teacher

4. Discussion questions shouldn’t be JUST about the Bible story or passage.

- a. Challenge them to think about applications.
- b. Challenge them to discuss challenges.



“Personalize” The Lesson

1. Make the lesson “their own”

- a. Put their name into the scripture verse.
- b. Write a personal note of commitment.
- c. Make a list of the things that challenge him/her.
- d. Teach a fellow student about the lesson.
- e. Put the lesson application into his/her own words.
- f. Draw a picture about the lesson.
- g. Call a friend or parent – tell them about the lesson.
- h. Act out a “current” rendition of the story.



A Specific Application

- 1. The lesson is more about affecting their lives than it is about “head knowledge.”
- 2. If there isn’t a specific challenge, the lesson will be lost.
 - a. Connect to their lives RIGHT NOW!
 - b. Challenge them with something they can do right away.
 - c. Give them a “prompt” – *“The next time you...”*
 - d. Give them clear steps to take mentally.
 - e. Tell them you will talk about their success next week.



A Lesson-related “Walk Out” Item

- 1. An object that they take home to remind them of the lesson and the application challenge.
 - a. Directly related to the lesson experience.
 - b. Simple, easy to carry.
 - c. Can be taped to a mirror or displayed on dresser.
 - d. Used as a stimulant for retelling the lesson to parents, etc.
- 2. Re-teaching the lesson to their parents (or others) increases the retention to 100%!



APPENDIX

Bazaar Ideas

1. Nerf ball games
2. Squirt guns
3. Musical chairs
4. Soccer (Nerf ball)
5. Scavenger hunt inside bus / trailer
6. Interactive, fun games
7. Create your own puzzles (statement with words cut up)
8. “Truth or Dare” (with conservative prompts) either general questions or lesson-related questions.
9. “What’s wrong with this picture?” – a picture that reflects something “wrong” or someone doing something “wrong.”
10. “Where’s Waldo?” (ish) – a picture with something or someone hidden.
11. A timer with a funny sound – when the sound happens, “It’s time for...!” A fun activity, a goodie, a joke, an activity, etc.
12. Take turns teaching – teacher sits down, and another student teaches.
13. Involve food (with allergy cautions) – decorating cupcakes, stringing cheerios, making “taffy” out of marshmallows,
14. Getting messy (within reason and boundaries)
15. “Shocking” or “strange” statements – as an introduction to the lesson and discussion. Listen to their questions/comments first!
16. “Stump the Teacher” – no planned lesson, kids get to ask questions about life, the Bible, people, God, etc. The teacher gives answers, scriptures, etc. Some answers may be “That’s a good one to ask your parents.” Other kids can assist with answers.
17. Science experiments – no smoke or fumes
18. Skype or Zoom interviews or tours

Science experiments / object lessons

1. Science Bob (a website with science experiments) - <http://www.sciencebob.com/experiments/>
2. Science Kids - <http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/experiments.html>
3. Steve Spangler Science - <http://www.stevespanglerscience.com/lab/experiments>
4. The Science Explorer - http://www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer/
5. KidZone - <http://www.kidzone.ws/science/>
6. Kids Science Experiments - <http://www.lovemyscience.com/>
7. Funology - <https://www.funology.com/funology-science-experiments/>
8. BuzzFeed Life - <http://www.buzzfeed.com/peggy/kids-science-experiments-that-adults-can-enjoy-too#411m1kn>
9. Red Tricycle - <http://redtri.com/classic-science-experiments/>

“Back door” lesson examples

1. Teach the lesson using the “opposite” example such as:
2. Be late to class to teach about discipline, respect, etc.
3. Dress messy to teach about first impressions
4. Burp loudly to teach about manners
5. Talk on phone or text while teaching to teach about focus, respect, etc.
6. Throw trash or empty water bottle on ground to teach about responsibility

“Who am I?” Bible guests

1. Let the children interview the Bible character, then guess who he/she is
2. A “time machine” (with dry ice pouring over it – a character steps through it)
3. An electronic “transporter” (with lights, sounds, etc.)
4. A Skype interview (with someone in another room)

Room transformation

1. The belly of the whale (Jonah) – dark room, tuna cans on foil in corners, humidifier, ocean sounds
2. Disrupt the room (everything upside down) to teach about cooperation
3. Teach the story of Noah by turning on and off the lights, spraying “rain” over the children’s heads, flashing lights for lightning, and assigning children to make animal sounds when prompted.
4. Give inexpensive glasses (from Oriental Trading Co.) to each child. The “lenses” are taped over with cellophane tape to block clear vision. Tell the story of the man Jesus healed of blindness, then have the children take off the glasses to see clearly.

“Get off the benches!”

1. “Go find a classmate who...” (feels the same as you do, has the same pet, has a similar prayer request, also needs help in school, etc.)
2. “Stand up if you...” (think this scripture applies today, think this person did the right thing, we should do something about this, etc.)
3. “Switch places if you...” (like peanut butter, have memorized a scripture this week, prayed for someone else this week, etc.)

Make your own PowerPoint games to challenge and reinforce lessons

1. EdGames - <http://people.uncw.edu/ertzbergerj/msgames.htm>
2. Internet 4 Classrooms - http://www.internet4classrooms.com/technology_tutorials/powerpoint_game_templates_technology_tutorials.htm
3. Microsoft Office Quiz Show - <https://templates.office.com/en-US/Search/results?query=quiz+show>
4. Break Free Youth Ministry - http://www.breakfreeyouthministry.com/ppt_games.htm
5. How To Create PowerPoint Games - http://www.pptfaq.com/FAQ00616_Creating_games_in_PowerPoint.htm

Using Questions

The process of asking questions forces the teacher to grapple with what actually needs to be known. The questions should not tell the information, but rather lead the learners to the information. Jesus was a master at this, “Whose picture is on this coin?” or “Woman, where are your accusers?”

1. Ask questions that stir their curiosity – “Why did David collect 5 stones?”
2. Ask questions that don’t have a “yes,” or “no” answer.
3. Ask questions with that drive them to read – “What made Jesus make a whip?”
4. Ask questions that surprise them – “Why didn’t God just kill Pharaoh to free the Jews?”

Using “What if” Scenarios

The use of “What if” scenarios force the learners to think beyond the “normal.” These scenarios force them to consider the motives, and the consequences of other choices.

1. What if Moses didn’t have a brother to “lean on”?
2. What if Jesus just appeared, rather than being born as a child and growing up?
3. What if the Apostles really did stop preaching about Jesus when they were told to?
4. What if Jesus never died for your sins?

Using “Role Play / Reversal” Experiences

Role-plays draw the learners into the story and make them feel, rather than just think. “Reversal” role-plays display the opposite of what the lesson is about.

1. Ask the learners to role-play the scene in which Jesus heals the lame man on the Sabbath.
2. Ask the learners to role-play the scene in which Moses gets angry and hits the rock.
3. Ask the learners to role-play an encounter with a selfish student who doesn’t share.
4. Ask the learners to role-play a conversation between two students who gossip.

Using Guest Visits / Interviews

Using guests or visitors is a way to teach through “the back door.” A guest or visitor can attract the learners and introduce or reinforce the learning in a way that the “normal” teacher cannot.

1. A bee-keeper who talks about treating mothers like the “Queen bee.”
2. A scientist who does experiments as object lessons for a deeper lesson.
3. A dancer who performs and talks about balance and grace in life.
4. A garbage collector who brings in a garbage can and talks about sin.

Using Video Clips

Video clips are the “language” of today’s kids. A short visual experience can either introduce or reinforce a concept. You can either play the whole clip and talk about it after (or before), or you can stop the clip in the middle and talk about it before letting it finish. Finding videos on YouTube is not as simple as using the website “WingClips” (wingclips.com). You can search for movies by topics! It is a great site!

1. Clips from movies they recognize.
2. Clips from television shows they recognize.
3. Clips from unknown movies or shows.
4. Clips from YouTube or WingClips

Using Songs

Music is a powerful tool for learning, but it is “complex” because it has to be understood by the learners. Music must suit the “tastes” of the learners, or it may become a block to learning. Listening to a whole song, or a major part of a song may be “boring” to some.

1. Listening to a section of a song.
2. Used as a background to another activity. Children can “hear” a song while doing something else, and the song can enhance the overall learning environment.
3. Asking the learners to “extract” the lesson from a song.

Using “Scavenger Hunts”

A “scavenger hunt” is a planned “search” for “hidden” items with the goal of forcing the learners to involve themselves with the lesson along the way.

1. Read the passage, and find 3 things in the room that relate to the passage.
2. Read the passage. Your first item to find is what Jesus was looking for...
3. Go out to the parking lot, and collect 5 items that God didn’t create.
4. Go out to the field next door, and find something that is related to the story or passage.

Using Unusual / Mystery Objects

Bringing in unusual or “mystery” objects (covered up) involves the learners’ curiosity and imagination. The more unusual, the more the challenge to the learner!

1. A “broken” lawn mower in the room – refer to a cookbook to try to fix it.
2. A caged animal in the room to illustrate our control of the “sin nature”
3. A covered “mystery object” – the learners try to guess based on lesson or passage
4. A covered “mystery object” – the learners get to feel/smell to guess to illustrate faith

Using Writing / Photography

For older students, the process of writing is a great way to get them to put the learning into their own words. Once a learner “translates” the learning into their own words, the learning is “sealed.”

1. “Newspaper” stories with pictures
2. Cartoon strips that they draw, with a story
3. Movie “story boards” with a story
4. Pictures that they write a “back story” to that illustrates the lesson or learning

Using Field Trips (live and video)

The mention of a “Field Trip” brings excitement to every learner! Taking the lesson “out” of the “normal” classroom increases the interest of the learners. You don’t have to leave the classroom to go on a “Field Trip.”

1. Show a nature video; ask the learners to thank God for His creative power
2. Film a “tour” of a store, facility, or home and ask the learners to look for lesson-related items
3. Take a “Skype trip” to a location related to the lesson and interview a person there.
4. Film a “tour” of somewhere lesson-related – learners guess where it is.

Using Games

Most learners love games. A game incorporates teamwork, competition, and the reward of winning. You can have your “standard” games ready to go at any time, or create special ones for special lessons.

1. “Bible baseball” played inside the room – learners answer questions “at bat,” and run around bases.
2. Popular game shows using PowerPoint –
 - a. <http://jc-schools.net/tutorials/PPT-games>
 - b. <http://teach.fcps.net/trt10/PowerPoint.htm>
 - c. <http://teachnet.com/lesson/misc/winnergame022500.html>
 - d. <http://facstaff.uww.edu/jonesd/games>
3. Create board games for lessons – email Steve Alley (skitsource@gmail.com) for directions.
4. Challenge the learners themselves to create games for the lesson, then play them in class.

Using Arts / Crafts

Everybody loves to color or create something using simple craft supplies! Don’t limit the use of this powerful experience by thinking that your learners might be “too old to do this.”

1. Make collages about the lesson or passage using magazine pictures (be careful with all magazines!)
2. Make large wall murals depicting the lesson or passage.
3. Make “take-away” items that remind the learners of the lesson all week long.
4. Create a “walk-through” experience for younger learners to enjoy.

Using Cooking / Food

The use of food propels the lesson’s effectiveness! Jesus was a master at incorporating food into His lessons (fish, bread, wine, meals in homes, etc.). Remember to work hard at getting the lesson into as many “holes in the head” as you can!

1. Object lessons (not sharing)
2. “This is what _____ tastes like...” (use of good and bad tasting items)
3. Following a recipe / following God’s directions in the Bible
4. Use food as a “craft” item, then eat the finished product

Using Personal Stories / Testimonies

A person’s story brings the learning to a “real world” level! Stories or testimonies transform the lesson from a sterile, printed page to a believable truth. This is a great experience for the teller and the listeners.

1. Stories of struggles with choices (be careful to make this positive)
2. Victories in evangelism
3. Answered prayers
4. Stories of God’s leading or protection

Using News Stories

Today’s news is filled with stories of people who make good choices and poor ones. The stories don’t always highlight the consequences, but they are always a great topic of discussion. News stories can also be a great “what do you think” springboard for discussions. Opening and reading a newspaper in class is a great visual!

1. Stories of people who broke the law
2. Stories of people who did the right thing

3. Stories of companies who got caught cheating
4. Advertisements that are designed to make you “believe” something

Using Popular TV Shows or Movies

Being able to “connect” with your learners by referencing television shows or movies they watch is an excellent way to do what Jesus did in teaching through parables. “Behold a farmer went out to sow...”

1. Simply use a character’s name or personality as an example
2. Refer to a scene that illustrates a point in the lesson
3. Use terminology from the show or movie in your conversation
4. Incorporate the show or movie in your questions or in video clips

Using “Controversial” Comments

The “shock” factor of a comment that is “controversial” cannot be underestimated. Often, the comment is related to the **opposite** view of the lesson. This technique forces the learners to think as a direct result of the “shock.” It causes the lesson to become “personal.”

1. God doesn’t know the future.
2. Only nice people go to Heaven.
3. There’s nothing wrong with eating donuts and chocolate milk all day!

Using “Guerilla” Drama

“Guerilla” drama is a “scene” that appears in the middle of a lesson following a cue from the teacher. This scene must be set up ahead of time, using willing “actors” from the class itself.

1. An argument arises between two learners during a lesson on forgiveness.
2. A learner begins texting during a lesson on paying attention to God, or conquering distractions.
3. Two learners begin talking and laughing loudly together during a lesson on respect.
4. A learner gets very angry and storms out of the class during a lesson on anger.

Creating Object Lessons

Principles To Remember

1. “There is nothing new under the sun!” (Solomon)
2. Search for ideas on websites, in books, or from others.
3. Your idea should be unusual, “risky,” and unexpected.
4. Your idea will probably not be found in your “things I’ve done before” file.
5. Your idea must include objects, visuals, experiences, or food from your audience’s world.
6. Your idea should be more visual than anything else.
7. Your idea can involve the audience moving (very limited!).
8. Your idea must relate to the lesson topic either directly, or indirectly.
9. Your idea should be accomplished within a 4-minute maximum (less is better).

The Process

1. Formulate your lesson objective
2. Consider your learners’ interests (food, clothes, terminology, entertainment, “toys,” etc.)
3. Consider what would be unusual, “weird,” or strange to your audience (related to their interests).
4. Seek a connection between #3 and #1
 - a. An positive example or representation of the lesson topic
 - b. A negative (opposite) example or representation of the lesson topic
 - c. Something that would make the learners understand the topic’s value