

Quaker First Day School for Busy People

So It's Your Turn to Teach First Day School

Welcome to this opportunity to wonder with the young Friends in your meeting, to be a mentor and role model, and to join together as you search for the Inward Teacher available to all. There are some excellent materials available to you to help you organize and present a First Day School (FDS) program. We have listed some of them at the end of this article. But you've been asked today! Here are a few ideas that others have found helpful.

Preparation and Procedure

- When asked to serve, ask the previous teacher or FDS coordinator what type of teaching approach is being used.
- To insure safety for teachers and students, invite another adult to work with you.
- At home, hold your plans for FDS in the Light. Get ready physically, spiritually, and emotionally.
- Arrive early. Arrange your room or space for the class.
- Greet the children as they arrive at meeting. Explain that you are their teacher for the day.
- Sit among your group of children in meeting for worship.
- If the children attend worship before starting First Day School, as you leave meeting for worship, stay ahead of, or with, children.
- Be certain that all of the children know each other and you. Welcome newcomers and guests.
- Teach your class.
- Remember to involve children in clean up.
- Remember to record notes about your lesson for teachers who might follow you.

A Common Schedule

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| 10–15 minutes: | Meeting for worship with adults. (Note: If this happens at the end of the schedule in your meeting, adjust accordingly.) |
| 5–10 minutes: | Welcome and introductions. Minimeeting: Reflect with children about their worship experience and key experiences of the past week, celebrate special events, introduce general theme. |
| 20–30 minutes: | Lesson and activity. |
| 5–10 minutes: | Clean-up and closure. |

Samples of two teaching approaches

Traditional

Opening, presentation, discussion, activity, closing, follow-up

- Begin with a concept and an objective (What do you want to teach/experience/discover with the children?)
- What media do you wish to use? (a song? a picture? a story from the Bible, a storybook, the news media, or from Quaker history?)
- How do you plan to present it? (Have student read it, read or tell it yourself, tape it for the students to hear, etc.)
- Help students to understand the concept through discussion, a puzzle, an art project, an activity to do during the week, writing their own song or story, writing a paraphrase, a sharing of personal experience in the area, a game to be played, a dramatization, and/or making a poster of the concept. As you explore the story, song, or picture with the children, use open ended questions. Having activity centers around the room allows you to incorporate a variety of learning styles.
- Remember to close with an activity, prayer, or song that ties everything together.
- How might the learning be shared? (For example, children may create a poster or picture to hang in the meetinghouse; interview adults on the topic; or sing a song, offer a puppet show, or prepare a query for the meeting or another group.)

Experiential

Story and response method

- Begin by establishing the learning space as a place of worship.
- Have children enter the learning space quietly.
- Share a story. Using tangible objects, such as sand for a desert or simple figures for characters or animals, can bring the story alive.
- Do not share your understanding of the story. Tell the story in a way that encourages the children to wonder. Use religious language to give the children a vocabulary for talking about faith matters.
- Use “I wonder” statements to invite the children to “wonder” with you as together you reflect on the story. Leave silence between wonderings. Keep in mind that the purpose of wonder questions is not to test children on what they remember, but to draw on their experience and inner knowing. Encourage them, through your modeling, to use stories to discover and name God’s presence.
- Provide an opportunity for each child to respond further using art materials or the objects used to tell the story. Encourage the children to let whatever God is doing in their hearts be expressed through working with the materials.
- Begin the closing by having a quiet community time together around a snack or informal sharing. As children leave circle, thank each child for coming and acknowledge his or her work.
- Note that with this lesson format, activities for ‘minimeeting’ and ‘follow-up’ need to occur outside the actual lesson time and, if possible, not in the same space.

Strategies for minimizing behavioral challenges

- Be willing to ask for the group's cooperation.
- Tell the children positively and politely what you expect. Acknowledge positive behavior; let go of any felt need to draw attention to negative behavior.
- Avoid using questions that challenge someone to say 'no.'
- Use "I" statements. Let the children know how you feel.
- Have the attention of the group before you start. (For example, you may say, "Clap once if you hear me. Clap twice if you hear me.")
- Give children the freedom to choose from acceptable behavioral choices.
- Encourage growth in community through your own choices.

The Unchangeable Givens in FDS

- The only thing to count on is inconsistency. Different children appear every First Day.
- There may be a wide range of ages.
- The First Day School materials you need may not be on hand.
- What works one time may not work the next, so be ready to switch gears.
- By being open to the Spirit, you experience God's presence along with the children.

Working with children in First Day School can be a wonderful opportunity to experience God's presence in new and intriguing ways. By being open to the Spirit, you can find the "teachable moment" when both you and the children explore the workings of the Divine in your lives and in the lives of Quakers long ago. Relax and have fun!

Recommended Resources

Snyder, Mary, *Opening Doors to Quaker Religious Education*, Quaker Press of FGC, 1999.

Religious Education Committee of FGC, *Opening Doors to Quaker Worship*, Quaker Press of FGC, 1994.

Snyder, Mary, *Quakers I & II, An experiential curriculum for people ages four through adult*, Quaker Cottage Industries, 2002.

Berryman, Jerome, *Teaching Godly Play, The Sunday Morning Handbook*, Abingdon Press, 1995.

Melton, Thornburg, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, Discipleship Resources, 2003.

FGC Religious Education website at www.fgcquaker.org

To find lots of great material to use in First Day School, check out the QuakerBooks of FGC catalog. See the section on "FirstDay School for Young People."

Call 1-800-966-4556 or visit

www.quakerbooks.org.

Credit: Mary Snyder, Virginia Wood, Laurie Rizzo, and the Elementary Focus Group of the FGC Religious Education Committee.

This is a publication of the Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference, 2006. Send any comments to Michael Gibson, RE Coordinator (contact information below).

This resource may be photocopied for monthly meeting use.

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