

<p style="text-align: center;">Eleven essential characteristics for early years scripture learning</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Years P – 3)</p> <p>Note: These characteristics describe what teachers need to DO with students.</p>	<p>Narrative: (the important role stories play in our lives)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use multiple ways of telling and retelling Scripture stories (felt boards, whiteboard story drawing, dramatization, sand play, using puppets / wooden ‘people’ ...) • Promote wondering and thinking about the text: I notice... (I notice a word that was used a lot in the story; I notice that the people in this story...; I notice that ...) I wonder... (I wonder what surprised you in this story? I wonder why the author wrote this story? I wonder what the author wants people to understand about God?) I think... (I think that this story....; I think that the author....; I think that....) How might... (How might this story help people understand something important about God? How might this story be helpful for people today? How might this story help us know how to live together as a class this year? How might our...) • Make connections between the text and the student’s own experiences 	<p>Explicit teaching: (ensuring clarity of learning purpose)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable students to understand the purpose for learning about the text (e.g. This is a story that helps people to understand important things about God...I wonder what we might learn about God from this story?) • Co-construct success criteria to enable the curriculum intent to connect with student abilities, interests and needs (e.g. In prep we need to be able to show that we can tell others about our thoughts, feelings and understanding about God. How could we do this? How could you think about what you have learnt about God through this story? In what ways could you tell me what you think and feel about God? Would you find it helpful to use lego blocks, draw your thinking, make your own special book, or would you like me to video you telling our class....?) • Support the development of student goals (What else would I like to learn about? Where do I need to build my knowledge?) • Provide feedback that is affirming and assists to move the learning forward 	<p>Playful: (making connections through imagination and creativity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for students to enter into the world of the text through dramatisation and imagination (interview characters; have a dress up box with old sheets, tea towels and curtain ties to create clothing in Bible times) • Use blocks and construction materials to build the Temple in Jerusalem; the village of Nazareth... • Translate to our context today (imagine the author was a member of our school community or our local area – how might the same story be written today, with the same meaning?) • Use different contexts for learning, such as utilising the sandpit (create the setting for the Good Samaritan story - build the road from Jerusalem to Jericho; imagine you are God creating the ‘earth creature’ – first human; go to the church to look at the Stations of the Cross and imagine that we were one of the people in the crowd; walk around the school looking for ‘signs of God’ with us, even though we can’t see God).
<p>Collaborative (being social and co-constructing learning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model ways to share active thinking and reflecting about the text, the author’s possible intentions for writing the text, and the possible impact of the text in the author’s community • Provide learning opportunities that are co-constructed with students (what are some different ways we could learn about this?) • Construct opportunities for peer problem solving and deep thinking about a text. 	<p>Learner focused (recognising that children learn in different ways)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop learning opportunities that are linked to student cultural backgrounds, interests, learning needs and ways that students enjoy learning • Encourage student feedback about the learning opportunities provided • Apply feedback to move the learning forward • Promote student ideas for how to create supportive learning environments for obtaining rich meaning from Scripture. 	<p>Scaffolded learning (providing support to extend children’s capabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill development grows in complexity (Where could I find a Bible in our class? How do I hold a Bible? How is my language developing to talk about what we can find in a Bible?) • Model... • Encourage... • Question... • Add challenges... • Identify where students are locked in surface level understanding and thinking. Identify strategies to extend their thinking. 	<p>Active (Physical and embodied learning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide learning opportunities for students to learn through movement (retelling Scripture stories through movement and sculpting characters using materials such as clay or using body movement) • Utilising different environments for learning, including outdoors (e.g. creation walk; using the sandpit for Scripture storytelling) • Plan independent, small group and whole group opportunities for learning. • Constructing biblical artefacts such as clothing, housing; the Temple; the house where Jesus was born; a desert landscape.

<p>Creative (fostering inquiry, creativity and thinking skills to investigate ‘What if?’ and explore new ways of thinking)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry tasks that enable students to learn through discovery • Identify questions that promote student thinking about a text (I wonder why the author wrote this story? How might this story help people to understand important things about God? How might this story help people understand how God wants people to live in our world?) • Establish questions that promote student wondering about connections between texts (e.g. Does this story remind you of any other story we have read in the Bible? Do you think this would be the only time in the Bible where we find a story with the same key messages? Why / why not? Can we find any similarity between stories written by the same author?) • What could we do to investigate what type of clothing people wore in the time of Jesus? • Start a lesson with an artefact that will stimulate student interest (e.g. An image of the Temple in Jerusalem; a Tallit - Jewish prayer shawl; a puppet that represents ‘Mary’; a letter ‘written’ from a Biblical character to the class and students discover it when they arrive in the morning) • Explore ‘What if...?’ questions. What if no one in the world thought this story was important? What if God wanted to say something really important to us through this story? What if this story has an important message that can help me for the rest of my life? What if the author lived in our world today – how might the tell this story today? 	<p>Responsive (being flexible and ensuring the learning is meeting the needs and interests of students, balancing structured, open-ended and spontaneous opportunities with both teacher-led and student-led learning)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about student interests, cultural and religious backgrounds to be attentive and responsive to the links between life, faith, culture and identity. Is there a family member who could be a guest speaker? What opportunities could be provided for students to share insights from their cultural or religious traditions? • Consider how teaching may impact on students at the level of faith, life, culture and identity. Model ways of being respectful of student identities. • Evaluate balance of student / teacher voice; student interest / curriculum intent; structured and open-ended activities and respond accordingly, ensuring flexibility of delivery to meet arising needs of students. • Take notice of student’s expressions when they hear the Scripture story and when they are participating in learning about the story. When the timing is appropriate ask students about their expression. e.g. Ella, I noticed that you had a puzzled look on your face when I was telling this story. Can you tell me what you were thinking? Lucas, I noticed that you were excited when you were shaping the play dough. Can you tell me what you were feeling and thinking? • Regularly check in with students. e.g. We’ve been learning about life in the time of Jesus. What has really interested you? Is there anything else you would like to learn about that we haven’t explored yet? • Create opportunities for students to lead the learning will happen. 	<p>Agentic (ensuring that children have a voice in their learning, and their interests and ideas contribute to the learning possibilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create opportunities for students to be involved in the decision-making process for how the learning will happen. • Promote opportunities for students to identify how the text reveals God’s dream for our world, from a faith and a human needs perspective. Encourage students to identify ways they could begin to bring about that dream, at individual, class, school or local community level. Construct a plan and put it to action (transformative learning). What is an attitude we could practise every day? What is an action we could do that would bring a big smile to God’s face? • Facilitate opportunities for student voice to be heard and acted upon, so that learning opportunities for students and the community are co-constructed. What did students really enjoy learning about? What did they think was challenging? What would students like to learn about next? • Talk readily about the notion of everyone in the class being responsible for learning. e.g. Although I’m your teacher, I cannot learn anything for you. So my job is to help you learn and your job is to help us discover how we can best learn together. You may have a great idea I have not thought about, so everyday I want to hear what we could do to best learn together. • Outline future learning and hear student ideas about how this learning could happen. e.g. Next week we will be learning about an Old Testament character called David. What would you like to learn about David? What would you like to do to learn about David? 	<p>Language rich and dialogic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-teach keys words and concepts before sharing a Scripture story. • Create a class Bible dictionary and continue adding to it throughout the year. • Write key words / phrases on cards. Hold up the cards as the story is told (e.g. Samaritan – students sharply draw in their breath to make a shocked noise). • Use sentence strips for shorter texts and place in correct order. • Write key words on ‘flags’ (eg. a word on paper attached to the top of a paddle pop) and place all around a scene student have created (house; road) • Foster an environment of utilising literacy skills (reading, writing, oral) for critical interpretation of Scripture (comparing similar texts from different author; talking about what is in the story that surprised or challenged...). • Construct deep critical thinking questions that can lead to rich dialogue about texts. Why might the author have written this story in this way? How might the author write this story for different communities today? I used to think...but now I think.... Encourage students to arrive at multiple, appropriate interpretations of the text and how the story could help them in life. (e.g. When I’m scared, I could remember the story about David and Goliath because... When my Mum asks me to do something that I think is too hard for me, I could remember the story of David and Goliath because...
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Acknowledgement:

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<https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/age-appropriate-pedagogies>

<https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/age-appropriate-pedagogies/characteristics>

<https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/earlyYears/Documents/foundation-paper.pdf>

Other resources for developing critical thinking questions:

Marzano Taxonomy Question Stems:

https://wres.pasco.k12.fl.us/wp-content/uploads/wres/2016/02/Marzano-Taxonomy_Questions-Stems-Phrases-Products1.pdf

Ideas that teachers and parents may find helpful to promote thinking skills for early years students:

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/developing-critical-thinking-skills-in-children>

More ideas for assisting early years students to build critical thinking skills:

<https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/thinking-skills>