

1

Creation: Skies and Seas, Plants and Trees

Scripture

Genesis 1:1-19

Focus

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (days 1-4).

Faith Nurture Goals

- Describe how God created each part of the world on days 1-4.
- Believe that the world didn't just happen by itself—God created it.
- Wonder at the beauty and variety of God's creation.

Memory Challenge

Genesis 9:12-13

Reflection: Getting into the Story

Since this background is for you, the leader, we'll spend a little time exploring how Christians today read this crucial first chapter of the Bible. While there are some who maintain that this is more or less an historical record of a six-day creation some 10,000 years ago, most evangelical and Reformed interpreters do not. A few points on our approach:

- Genesis was written in a prescientific culture that understood the earth as flat, covered with a solid dome, built on pillars.
- Since the earth itself is also a revelation of God (see Belgic Confession, Art. 2), we accept scientific evidence that the world is probably at least millions of years old and its creatures have very likely in some way evolved over time.
- This chapter does not present a scientific or historical picture of *how* creation came into being, but it does reveal these crucial truths that science can never discover—that *God created the world*, that it was good, and that human beings have a special place in creation by being endowed with God's image.

(For further exploration of these issues, read *Origins* by Faith Alive Christian Resources.)

It's not likely that these issues will be raised by the children in your group, but they may, and you should be prepared with answers on their level (see tips below). But here are the essential truths of the passage:

- *In the beginning*: We are talking about the origins of all things, not from a scientific perspective but from a spiritual or theological perspective.
- *In the beginning God*. God is completely prior to creation, being eternal and also distinct from creation. God made it, and is not in any way a part of it.
- *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. In whatever way, in however long a time, God is the creator of all things.

It's also fascinating that the whole creation starts with a dark brooding chaos. The Bible describes it as "formless and empty," a dark chaotic void. For the children it might best be compared to walking into an unknown dark world with fearful shadows and creaking sounds. What follows is a process by which God establishes order over chaos. Every step of the way is an ordering of the world, placing boundaries, assigning things into their proper place. Notice too how the Spirit (breath) of God is the agent of this ordering.



First comes light—just as the first thing we do when we walk into a dark room is to switch on the light. Many have noted that this seems strange before the sun and moon are created. Again, this is not a scientific description. The first act of God is to turn on the light in the dark and to order time—day and night. Next God orders space, dividing the water above from the water below, and the water from the dry land. Then God takes the dry ground and creates the creatures to live in them. Note how the Creator takes the chaotic (night, waters, and seas) and gives them an ordered place. By the way, the idea common among Israel’s neighbors—that the sun, moon, and stars are divine beings—is completely rejected. They are great and wonderful, but still merely God’s creatures.

God made, and continues to rule and uphold, a world that is designed for our living. Each part has its own place, its own beauty and goodness. And it’s all to the glory of the Creator!

Wondering

- What is your understanding of this chapter in the light of modern science?
- Why is the ordering of the creation emphasized?
- What does it mean that God created by speaking his Word?

Teaching

- In the light of what the children may be learning in school now or later, it’s wise not to present this too simply as an historical picture of how God created everything. Just convey the deep truth that God made it all, that God made it orderly for us to live in with all his creatures, and that God made it good.

General Materials

Each session of *Dwell* includes specific materials you’ll need for teaching it, such as printable pages or props to use for telling the story. In addition, you’ll want to keep a stash of the usual teaching supplies: Bibles, scissors, markers, pencils, whiteboard or newsprint, and the like, including a CD player or MP3 player and *Dwellsongs*.

Session at a Glance

Steps	Time	Activities	Session-Specific Materials	Multiple Intelligences
Gathering for God’s Story	12	Name tags Praise and prayer Riddles Story symbol	<input type="checkbox"/> Name tags (printable page 62), one for each child and leader <input type="checkbox"/> Song: “This Is My Father’s World” <input type="checkbox"/> Story symbols, session 1 (printable page 57), cut apart	Aa
Entering the Story	8	Story		Aa
Living into the Story	10	Pizza pictures	<input type="checkbox"/> Pizza picture shapes (printable pages 63-64), one of each per child <input type="checkbox"/> Clear tape	
Living Out of the Story	15	What’s in the Bag? Memory Challenge accordion cards Closing	<input type="checkbox"/> Paper bags <input type="checkbox"/> Nature items (see activity) <input type="checkbox"/> Memory Challenge card (printable page 55 or 56), one per person <input type="checkbox"/> Show and Share papers, session 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Dear Family letter, (printable page 54 or email version from www.dwellcurriculum.org), one per child	Aa

Step 1 Gathering for God’s Story

Greet kids warmly as they enter. Introduce yourself and introduce each one to the group. As the group gathers, invite them to the craft table to make name tags; make one for yourself too. Invite kids to color the animals on the name tags. Have them paper-clip the tags to their clothing.

Tip

If your group doesn't know each other well, take time to have them get to know each other by asking questions about pets, favorite games, brothers and sisters, least favorite household chore, favorite food, least favorite food, favorite color, and so on.

As the children work, mention the notable colors they are wearing. Tell each one that today they will be thinking about colors—a whole world full of them!

Open the time of praise with prayer, using this prayer or one of your own.

Dear God, thank you for bringing us together. We are eager to learn more about you and more about each other. Help us to listen to what you want us to learn today. Amen.

Introduce your group to the unit song "This Is My Father's World." The lyrics (found on page 52) are traditional and the music has been updated with a fun rock sound. As you learn the song together invite your group to make up actions for words like: my, Father's, world, ears, rest, rocks, trees, skies, seas, shines, rustling grass, speaks, heart, sad, etc. (Before the session begins you may find it helpful to circle or highlight words in the lyrics that lend themselves well to simple actions.) Have fun together as you praise God and celebrate creation with this song.

Tell the group that you have some riddles about colors and wonderful fruits and vegetables that God provides for us to enjoy. Enjoy the riddles!

- **I am pink and green and black. What am I?** (*watermelon*)
- **I am green on the outside and the same color on the inside. What am I?** (*green bean, green pepper*)
- **I am yellow and grow on an ear. What am I?** (*sweet corn*)
- **My name is the same as my color. What am I?** (*orange*)
- **I come in many colors—red, gold, yellow, and green. You hold me in your hand to eat me. What am I?** (*apple*)
- **I am brown, tan, red, or orange. I can be as small as a golf ball or as big as a man's hand. Almost everyone likes me! What am I?** (*potato—talk about the different ways potatoes are fixed: boiled, mashed, French fried, cubed, shredded*)

Tip

As in Wonder Year 1, each session's story has its story symbol. (In sessions 1 and 2 of this unit there are two symbols per session.) For more information on the story symbols and ideas on how to display the symbols in your room, see page 3 of this guide.

- **I am light green. I am not quite as long as your arm. I am crunchy. I have leaves at the top of me. What am I?** (*celery*)
- **I am yellow and as big as a softball. People make juice out of me or cut me in half and eat me. I am kind of sour. What am I?** (*grapefruit*)

Show the story symbols and invite kids to describe what they see. Tell them that today's story is about the very beginning of the whole world and about how God made all those good things to eat that we just talked about when we did the riddles.

Step 2 Entering the Story

Re★formed

We know God by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe . . . like a beautiful book in which all creatures . . . are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God. . . . Secondly, God makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word. (Belgic Confession, Art. 2)

As you prepare for the story, teach kids the following call as a way to greet the story together. You will use it each week:

Storyteller: Listen with your ears and heart—

Listeners: and learn more of God's great story.

Invite kids to close their eyes. Explain that you will give them a word picture to draw in their minds. Give them the following picture:

In the beginning—before there were skies and seas and plants and trees, there was nothing. No earth. Just emptiness. There was no shape or form to anything. It was dark. But God's spirit was moving back and forth over all that darkness and emptiness. (*Pause; ask the group to finish drawing that picture in their minds.*)

Open your eyes. Describe the picture you saw in your mind. *(Pause for responses.)* **How was God’s Spirit moving back and forth?** *(Pause for responses.)*

Open the Bible and read Genesis 1:1. Show kids that it is the very first verse in the whole Bible. Have them say it with you. Close the Bible and continue with the rest of the story as follows:

How do you think our great and loving God did that? Do you think he went to a great big store in the heavens and bought some black tape to make stripes on the zebras, some fur for the giant polar bears or some feathers to put on the birds? *(Pause for responses.)*

The truth is; God’s creative power is amazing! It all came to be when God spoke. God commanded things to happen, and just like that, they happened! God had complete power over that entire dark nothing that had been there.

Listen to what God said. God didn’t use fancy words or long sentences. God said, “Let there be light!” Suddenly—there was light! God separated the light from the darkness! There was morning and there was night. That ended the first day of creation.

On the second day, God said, “Let there be sky above and water below.” As soon as God spoke the words, it happened. Blue sky appeared above the water. That was the end of the second day.

I wonder how fast or slow those changes happened. Do you think they happened really fast like the snap of a finger or slow enough that you could see things changing? *(Pause for responses.)*

On the third day, God knew exactly what to do, just as God knew on the previous days. God looked at the world and saw that the land and water were all mixed together like a huge pot of soup! There were no mountains—no rivers—no lakes—and no sandy shores. God spoke. “Let there be dry ground, separate from the water.” When God finished, lakes sparkled, streams gurgled, rivers flowed, and giant waves pounded the shores of the oceans.

But God wasn’t finished. The land was bare and brown. So God spoke again. “Let the ground be filled with grass and trees and plants!” And with God’s words, green grass and red roses and flowering bushes grew right out of that dry, dry ground. There were apple trees, strawberry plants, cucumbers—fruits and vegetables of all kinds and colors. That was the end of the third day.

I wonder why God would make all that food. What do you think God had in mind? *(Pause for responses.)*

Next God looked into the great sky, and God spoke. “Let there be lights in the sky!” Then the sky changed. There was a great ball of fire—the sun—that lit up the day sky. There were millions and millions of stars that lit up the night sky, and one giant moon! No matter whether it was day or night, there were lights in the sky.

God looked at the world. It was good—very good. It was exactly the way God planned it to be. Perfect! That was the end of the fourth day.

End of story

When the story is finished, close the Bible and tell kids that that ends today’s part of God’s great story. That will help them understand that what follows is *about* God’s story, but is not the Bible story.

Discuss the story with the group. Ask how they would answer these questions if someone asked them:

- **How did God make the world?**
- **Are you sure that the world didn’t just happen all by itself?**
- **How do you know that?**

Faith Modeling

As you talk about God’s great world, show your own wonder at the variety and beauty of creation by telling the kids what you most enjoy about it. Be specific about such things as favorite trees, flowers, foods, and so on.

- **Think about all the things God created on these first four days. Which is most amazing to you? Most awesome?**

Close with a circle sentence prayer. Go around the circle and have each person say a sentence of thanks for one awesome item they mentioned earlier.

Step 3 Living into the Story

Distribute the printable pages to each child. Have them cut out the half circles and tape them together on the back. Read together the words that circle the outer edges. Tell the kids that we will call this a pizza picture because the paper looks like a pizza cut into four slices.

Briefly retell what God did on each day. After each, pause so the kids can draw a picture of that day. As they work, ask the following questions to spark their creativity:

- *Day 1:* **I wonder what the light looked like since there was no sun yet. Do you think the darkness was really dark since there were no stars or moon yet? Do you think it was black or just a lot of dark colors mixed together?**
- *Day 2:* **God created a bright blue sky somewhere in the place of light. Was the sky empty or do you think there were clouds floating or moving quickly through that sky?**
- *Day 3:* **Wow! On this day God's world explodes with sounds and colors: rivers, lakes, oceans, dry ground with all kinds of plants, trees, flowers, veggies and fruits. Is it hard to squeeze it all in?**
- *Day 4:* **God tossed great lights into the sky. How will you show the night sky and the day sky? When God looked at the world at the end of this day, how do you think God felt?**

When finished, tell kids that you will keep the pizza pictures with you until the next session, when they will finish them.

Step 4 Living Out of the Story

Before the session begins make a sample Memory Challenge card using the directions on page 11 (hang on to it for future sessions.) You'll also want to assemble bags of items from nature, as follows:

- Locate several items from nature such as bark, a flower, a stone, a leaf, sand, grass, a pinecone, twigs, a cattail, a shell, a nut, a dandelion, a clover, and so on.
- Using a marker, number each paper bag on the flat side.
- Place one item in each bag and fold it shut.

Tip

Try to have enough bags so that no one has to wait long in line at the beginning or end of the activity—as many bags as kids would be great.

Place the bags in numerical sequence around a table. Open them up and lay them on the flat sides, numbers on top, so kids can slip their hands in the bags without seeing the items.

Give each child a paper and pencil. Have them number their papers according to the number of items you brought. Tell them that each bag contains something from God's great big world—an item that God created on day 3. They should slip one hand inside and feel the item—but not look at it—and write what they think it is next to the number on their papers that is the same as the number on the bag.

When everyone understands what to do, have them spread out around the table, each one starting at a different number, and rotate around the table to the right.

When finished, hand out the bags and have each child open one, one at a time. Have them see how many correct guesses they had without making an issue out of who had the most correct.

Before kids leave, guide kids in putting together their Memory Challenge card for this unit. Distribute copies of the Memory Challenge text, and follow these steps together:

- Cut the three vertical strips apart. Remove the edging along the four sides of the page by cutting around the paper along the slash lines.
- Lay the strips in order. Tape the strips together to form one long strip.
- Tape the third strip to the rest, also on the back.
- Read the text together. Tell the kids that the text is from a story they will have in a few weeks. It's about a promise God makes with creation and people—a promise that God will never again destroy the whole earth with a flood.
- Fold the strips on the dotted lines and fold like an accordion. Remind kids to make sure the cover is shown on top.

Before kids leave, distribute the Show and Share papers for this session. Because this is the first session of the education year, explain that the papers are called that because they are for showing to someone at home and sharing the story and activities with them.

Pause to look at page 1 of the Show and Share papers. Point out the “On the Way Home” activity, which they can do alone or with one or more people in the car. Challenge kids to find at least six of the items so they can have a high-five party when they get home.

(If possible, set out a box of crayons and invite kids to take a crayon so they are ready to roll!)

If you've printed out a Dear Family letter, be sure to give those to family members as the children leave, or e-mail it and tell them to check their in-boxes for important information about the next five sessions in their child's small group.

Tip

Add your phone number or email address to the front page of each paper and encourage kids (with parental permission) to call, email, or text you when they get home to let you know how many of the items they found.

Tip

Have kids leave behind the name tags they made today so you can use them again next session.

Easy Extras

1. Arrival Activity: Picture Me!

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: Show and Share papers for session 1, crayons or markers

Hand out the papers and have the kids write their names at the top of the back page. Have them draw pictures of fruits and veggies as instructed on the page. As they do, focus on talking about the amazing variety of tastes, colors, and textures God gave us in all these good things to eat. Save the story of creation for the story time.

2. Picture Story

This activity can be used instead of Step 2: Entering the Story.

Time: 5-8 minutes

Materials: Show and Share paper for session 1

Read the story from the inside spread of the Show and Share paper, enjoying the pictures together as you read. The first time through, insert the words yourself. The second time through, have kids suggest the words that belong on the lines. They will likely be able to do that without even knowing which words are on the Lost Words list.

When you finish, use some of the wondering questions from Step 2; close with discussion and prayer.

3. Apple Snacks 🌍🚶

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: several varieties of apples, knife, napkins

Bring some juicy apples. Slice one open horizontally and show kids the star shape that appears inside and the small seeds from which apples trees grow. Talk about the many different kinds of apples God made—each with its own type of seeds, each with its own shape and flavor. Encourage kids to sample slices of the different kinds of apples. Ask if they think there is a difference in taste or texture.

4. Nature Walk 🌍👤📷🚶

Time: 5-15 minutes

Materials: none needed

If it's a nice day for a walk and your church is in an area where nature surrounds you, have the kids take a walk, looking for a single plant or tree that to them is most beautiful, unusual, fragrant, and so on. Encourage them not to pick up or take things—just look and enjoy.

As you walk, pause to notice the difference in trees—bark, leaves, and shape. Do the same with flowers. At the end of the walk, have each child tell the things he most enjoyed. Marvel and wonder together at God's great world.