

Characteristics of the Primary Child

Though children will vary greatly from one to the next, the following general characteristics of children 8-9 years old may help you to understand their behavior and development.

Physical

- ◆ growth rate slows down but is steady
- ◆ because they are energetic but often restless, they will be able to work longer on projects of interest to them but may become impatient with delays or inability to accomplish things quickly
- ◆ becoming more independent
- ◆ developing small muscle control – girls are typically ahead of boys in this development

Mental

- ◆ careful observer – likes to see how things work
- ◆ curious and full of questions
- ◆ enjoys looking up information and discovering answers
- ◆ strong imagination and creative skills
- ◆ concrete and literal thinking, but beginning abstract thought

Social

- ◆ usually very friendly towards others
- ◆ relates quite well with others and enjoys group activities
- ◆ seeks group approval with peers but also likes having a special friend
- ◆ competitive, with a strong sense of fairness

Emotional

- ◆ sympathetic towards others
- ◆ torn between the need to be a child and the desire to be grown up
- ◆ wants approval and may feel insecure and worried
- ◆ may have difficulty expressing feelings when troubled about something

Spiritual

- ◆ seeks love, security, and assurance
- ◆ thinks of God as a friend and companion
- ◆ needs to hear truths repeated and explained
- ◆ concerned about right and wrong, and is learning personal responsibility for actions

Tips for Teaching

- ◆ Before Sunday school starts, send a personal note to each student, encouraging them to come to Sunday school, explaining what you will be doing in class, when the first session will be, and where your classroom will be.
- ◆ Pray for your students and their families by name. Ask God to guide you as you teach His Word and share the love of Christ with them.
- ◆ Get to know your students personally. Greet the children as they come in the door. Learn about their interests and concerns. Have puzzles, coloring sheets, or other projects available for students who come early. Have appropriate music playing softly in the background before class and during activity times.
- ◆ Try to meet the parents if you do not know them. Talk with them as they bring or pick up their child.
- ◆ Share about your personal relationship with Christ as you talk with children and parents.
- ◆ Always emphasize that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that there is nothing we can do to earn our salvation.
- ◆ For additional specific teaching instructions related to this curriculum, review Lesson 1.

Discipline

- ◆ Pray for patience, understanding, and guidance when discipline concerns arise.
- ◆ Establish a personal caring relationship with each student. Show personal interest in their lives and demonstrate the love of Christ in your words and actions.
- ◆ Carefully planning and preparing lessons will help you to present an orderly classroom environment and will help to prevent behavioral problems.
- ◆ The most effective and probably easiest way to discourage misbehavior is to let students know what you expect and then reinforce appropriate behavior.
- ◆ Discipline should immediately follow inappropriate behavior.
- ◆ Remember that the goal of discipline is different from that of punishment. Discipline is given in order to help the child to become self-disciplined.
- ◆ Keeping children occupied will prevent most discipline problems from occurring.
- ◆ Give gentle reminders about proper behavior and affirm good behavior.
- ◆ Point out natural or logical consequences. For example: When a child writes on the table, he or she must wash it off. Or when a child is making unwanted noise with some object, walk over to the child and take the object away. The object may be returned to the student after class.
- ◆ Be consistent and as fair as possible in all situations.
- ◆ When reprimanding a child, use direct eye contact. This alone may make a child stop misbehaving.
- ◆ If the entire class seems to be distracted, stop the lesson and have a stretching or bending exercise for a moment or two.
- ◆ Discuss behavior concerns with your superintendent or pastor for further suggestions.
- ◆ If misbehavior is persistent, a parent should be contacted. When talking with parents about a behavior concern, first stress the positive attributes of the child and then move on to the behavioral concern. Describe what you have done to stop the misbehavior, and ask the parents if they have any other suggestions that you could try. Then discuss with the parents how this could be reinforced at home.

Memorization

Why memorize? Memorization of Scripture is not an end in itself; it is not just something to take up time or to give the students a contest. Memorization of Scripture is an important part of Christian education for children and adults. When we memorize God's Word, we are hiding something in our hearts and minds that the Holy Spirit will faithfully use to:

- ▶ Convict of sin
- ▶ Guide us in right and holy living
- ▶ Help us obey authority
- ▶ Give us comfort and encouragement
- ▶ Help us resist temptation
- ▶ Witness to others of God's blessing to us – salvation, peace, joy
- ▶ Help us make decisions in accordance with God's will
- ▶ Help us express our thoughts to God in prayer
- ▶ Bring to our minds God's promises and encourage us to claim them
- ▶ Prepare us for the future

Memorization of Scripture verses and the petitions of the Lord's Prayer and their meanings is a very important part of this Sunday school series. Children's minds are like sponges, and most children are capable of a great deal of memorizing. Ages 8-9 are often called the "golden years of memory" because of the ease with which children memorize. It is important, therefore that the teacher spends the necessary time on memorization and review to ensure that children are indeed learning Scripture and the catechism.

What are some principles for teaching memorization?

1. Set a good example. The teacher needs to memorize what he/she expects the student to memorize. Understand the verse (vocabulary, meaning) and help students to apply it to their own lives.
2. Be selective. Consider the age and abilities of the students. Perhaps the teacher will need to allow some students more time to memorize a selected verse, catechism, etc., as well as expect other students to memorize larger portions of Scripture. Bible memory should never be used as punishment.
3. Teach with understanding. Help students to understand what the verse means and be able to give an appropriate application.
4. Expect word-perfect memorization. Set the standards high!
5. Review, review, review. If Scripture verses and catechism are not reviewed, they are memorized for class or contest only, and the reason for memorization is lost. Refer to the memory verse and catechism regularly throughout the lesson. Reproducible review worksheets/quizzes are provided in the teacher manual, but review should not be limited to these occasions only.
6. Involve parents in the memorization process if possible. The Overview of Lessons and Letter to Parents in the student book are designed to enable parents to encourage and assist in Bible memorization.

How can I help children memorize or “learn a verse by heart”? The following steps will help children learn to say the verse correctly, understand the verse, and retain the verse in their heart:

1. SEE IT.

Write it on a poster, chalkboard, overhead, etc. Let someone read it out of the Bible while others follow along or look at a chart. It is important that the children have the same Bible translation for their class work [note this curriculum uses the New American Standard Bible (NASB)]. Let students make their own notebook of verses, which will give them an opportunity to see the verse again as they write it out.

2. SPELL IT.

Define words as needed. Ask, “What does this verse mean?” Students may want to use their notebook to write down word meanings or to explain the verse in their own words.

3. SAY IT.

Make a goal of repeating the verse at least 10 times during the class period. Say the verse as the students listen, ask students to say it together, give students opportunity to say the verse alone, or try putting the verse to music and singing it together.

4. SEAL IT.

Not to review is to leave the work half done. Use the verse in the Bible lesson. Say it before a treat, before/after a song, or while you are doing an activity. Use flashcards, puzzles, secret codes, choral reading, a memory verse chart, or other ideas to review verses.

Memorization and Review Techniques

Suggestions for teaching the memory verses are included in each lesson plan. However, the teacher should always adapt as needed for each particular class. The following ideas may also be used in memorization and review:

Verse Card Scramble

Write the memory verse on index cards, one word per card. Scramble the cards upside down on the table, and then let the students put the cards in order to complete the verse. This can also be done as a race with two teams and two different sets of cards. If you have several different verses written out, the verse card scramble can be used as a review game. If the students are not told which verse they are unscrambling, the game will be more challenging.

Praying Hands Basket

Using the pattern in the Teacher Manual, cut 12 praying hands (one for each lesson) from construction paper or poster board. Write the memory verse on one side of the praying hands and the reference on the other. Keep the cards in a basket in the classroom, adding a new verse each week. To review the verses, take turns drawing a card from the basket. Read the reference, and allow the student to recite the memory verse.

Word Skip

Lead the class in saying the memory verse together two or three times. Then begin saying the verse alone, pausing when you get to the fourth word. Let the class or an individual fill in the missing word. Then continue skipping or pausing at every fourth word, again letting someone fill in the missing word. Continue this pattern until you complete the verse. Repeat, this time skipping every third word. Then repeat again, this time skipping every other word. Finally, ask the class or individuals to say the verse without any assistance.

Teaching Music

- ◆ Third graders are reading fluently by now, and hopefully they have begun learning to read music. Third graders love to sing! Remember that when you show your joy and enthusiasm they will remain interested in singing the music.
- ◆ One way to first introduce a song with more than one verse is to sing one verse at a time on a weekly basis and then have the children sing it back to you. Have the students look at the melody and trace the direction of the melody as it moves up and down. They will be able to read the words and follow the melody. Give them lots of times to try this! Continue through the verse until you have completed it. Now sing the verse phrase by phrase and have the children echo it back to you. Then sing half the verse (if it's short you can sing the whole verse) and have them echo it. Then conclude with the second half in the same way. Now sing the verse all together with the children. In the weeks following, you can teach the rest of the song. But always repeat the verses previously learned. The children will have them stored in the library of their minds when they need to be comforted or need guidance in life's situations.
- ◆ Add creative actions or hand signs when possible. If the actions or hand signs are not too complicated, you may want to add them while you are speaking the words and the children are echoing the words. Anytime a child can connect an action or body movement with the words of a song, the song is learned more quickly. This kinesthetic activity (like signing or other actions) helps the child to retain the words of the song and the music too.
- ◆ Read the words of the song with the students before singing. Then teach them the music by singing it for them and asking them to repeat it. Using your hand to show pitch levels and the direction of the notes of the melody will also help the children to learn the music a little more quickly. Some third graders will be comfortable singing alone. Ask if there are some who would like to sing the song alone or with you. You may even have a third grader who can play the melody or the whole song on the piano or another instrument. This age level loves to play for one another, but be careful that it doesn't become a competition.
- ◆ No matter what method you are using to teach the music, always remember that it is very important to explain words that the children may not understand. Also remember to create a spirit of reverence and respect toward God by the way you sing the music. By your words and actions, make use of every opportunity to tell about and show God's great love!
- ◆ Suggested songs are listed in the "Hymns and Songs" section of each lesson. However, the teacher should freely use music at any point in the lesson where it seems appropriate. Sometimes, a song may seem especially fitting after teaching the lesson or reviewing the memory verse. Other times, it may seem appropriate to close your class time with a special song. Be flexible and creative, always adapting as needed. Even though you probably will not sing all the suggested songs every week, you may want to read some of the stanzas with the children to help teach important Bible truths.