

Bible background

Matthew 20:1-16

Aim of lesson

To show that we should not be jealous of others, but content with what we have.

Preparation required

You will need a small bunch of grapes, made of plasticine if real ones are not available; pictures of a vineyard, some coins and wax crayons.

Suggested outline of lesson

1. Produce the grapes and ask the children where they come from. Show them your pictures as you describe the huge clusters of grapes growing on vines, the terraced hillside and enclosing wall. Discuss with them the different jobs that would need doing, for example, planting, weeding, pruning, picking and pressing. Let each of them mime one of the tasks while the others guess what they are doing. Explain that extra labour was needed at certain times of the year, and that men who wanted this work could wait in the market place to be hired.
2. Tell the children that they are going to help you act out one of the parables Jesus told. You are the owner of the vineyard and they are all labourers waiting for work. Go through the story, telling the first ones you hire that they will each receive a penny (the standard daily rate for labourers) and setting them to work. Hire the others as the day proceeds, telling them they will be paid what is right.
3. When all the children are pretending to work in the vineyard announce that it is the end of the day and time for their wages. Ask them to line up, with those who have worked the shortest time at the front. Give each child a penny and see if there is any reaction. There will probably be cries of 'that's not fair' from those who worked the longest; if not, ask them how they feel about their pay, encouraging the first ones hired to grumble and complain.
4. Tell the class that those who grumbled were wrong, and see if they can give you reasons why. The points to make are that (a) the men agreed to work for one penny, and that is what they received; (b) the owner has been generous with his own money, realising that those who waited all day for work still needed money to feed their families and (c) it is wrong to feel jealous of others, particularly if we have sufficient for our needs.
5. Teach the children that when we work for Jesus, for example, by helping others, we do it because we love him and not expecting a reward. To go any deeper into the parable, equating God with the owner and the coin with eternal life is probably best left for older children.
6. Complete the activity sheet by (a) counting the workers on the left hand side and doing each one a wax rubbing of a coin on the right hand side; (b) joining each worker to a coin and colouring him in and (c) drawing pictures in the boxes at the bottom, for example, homes, parents, favourite foods, etc.

Alternative activities

1. Make some bunches of Plasticine or salt dough grapes.
2. Role play working in the vineyard preparing the soil, planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, pruning etc.
3. Make some print pictures of bunches of grapes using different methods e.g. fingers, small round pieces of sponge, bottle tops etc.
4. Make some coins by wrapping circles of Plasticine in foil and decorate some simple paper purses/money bags to keep them in.

Relevance to the children's lives

How often do the children moan and think things are unfair? Encourage them to be grateful for what they do have, and also to be glad for others when they receive things.

Prayer

Ask God to help them be content with what they have, rather than being greedy and always wanting more.

Verse

'A greedy man brings trouble to his family.' Proverbs 15:27.

Song

Sunday School could be opened or closed with a song to encourage everyone to thank God for their blessings.