

Bible background

John 18:1-9; Matthew 27:27 - 28:15; Luke 23:32-34

Aim of lesson

To teach the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus from the point of view of the soldiers who were involved. To teach the love of Jesus even for these people and to remember that we can react either well or badly to him.

Preparation required

Bearing in mind the children in your class, decide how you are going to tell the story. You could decide not to do the lesson if you think it might be too upsetting.

Collect some stiff card or thin sticks to support the soldiers when the children have made them. They will need some plasticine to make a base. Find a box to make a tomb, and make it stone-coloured with paper or paint. Cut out a hole in one side, and make a 'stone'. You will need some coloured (ideally red) sticky tape to seal the tomb, and some suitable instant glue. For younger children you will need to cut out the soldiers in advance.

Suggested outline of lesson

1. Get the children to cut out the soldiers from the activity sheets, and colour the plume on one of the helmets to make a centurion. Glue the fronts and backs together and support them so that they stand up. While they are doing this you could discuss what soldiers are, what they do, and what sort of people they have to be to do the job. Use these soldiers throughout the lesson to move around your table as you describe what happened.
2. Remind the class of last week's lesson, how Judas had betrayed Jesus and he had been arrested. Get the class to imagine that they had been in the group that went to arrest Jesus, and how afraid they were; not because Jesus was unkind but because they knew his power and imagined he would react like other people they had arrested.
3. Describe how the soldiers took Jesus to Pilate, and in an appropriate way for your class talk about the trial, the mocking and scourging of Jesus.
4. Talk about the crucifixion itself. Get the class to talk about times when they have been punished unfairly or hurt by a bully. How did they feel? Tell them of Jesus' wonderful prayer 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'
5. Get the children to imagine that they are one of the soldiers guarding the cross, and lead the story up to the confession of the centurion in Matthew 27:54. What had convinced this hardened soldier that Jesus was the Son of God?
6. Now produce the tomb. Tell briefly the story of Joseph and Nicodemus, and arrange the soldiers around the tomb to guard and seal it. The seal, incidentally, will presumably have been like the seal on a letter, made by pouring hot wax in one place across the join of the stone and the tomb, and then stamping it with the mark of an official seal - perhaps a ring. In this way it would be impossible to open the tomb without breaking the seal. Get the class to think what it must have been like to stand for hours outside a grave.
7. Describe the earthquake and the coming of the angel, and again get the class to imagine how the soldiers would have felt (Matthew 28:4).
8. Tell how the soldiers went to the chief priests and were paid to lie about the resurrection. All the time, however, they knew the real truth: Jesus was alive again; his wounds did not hurt, and he was very happy.

Alternative activities

1. Make different seals by pressing objects into play dough.
2. Make a collage picture of Jesus in the garden by the empty tomb (either individually or one large class picture.)

Relevance to the children's lives

The way Jesus behaved can help us when we are treated unfairly. Sometimes we may need to be brave to tell people that we believe in him. Some of the soldiers were afraid to say, but the centurion wasn't.

Prayer

Pray for help to ask God to help even our enemies and people who hurt us.

Verse

'He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.' Matthew 28:6.