

GREAT BIG beautiful WORLD

Dig In Leader Guide

Portions of this work copyright © 2021 The Pastoral Center / PastoralCenter.com. Photos not otherwise credited are from Getty Images. Bible memory verse taken from the *Good News Translation in Today's English Version: Second Edition*, a translation approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission. Adapted and reprinted with permission from Great Big Beautiful World. © 2020 MennoMedia, Inc., Harrisonburg, VA 22803. All rights reserved. *Dig In Leader Guide* credits: Anita Brock Bryant, writer; Chrissie Walls, Joan L. Daggett, and Rachel Nussbaum Eby, editors; Reuben Graham, senior designer..



**Growing Up
Catholic**
A ministry of The Pastoral Center

Welcome to **GREAT BIG beautiful WORLD**

Great Big Beautiful World is a one-week Vacation Bible School (VBS) curriculum that embraces Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and our call to care for our common home. It begins with the creation story in Genesis 2 and includes psalms, stories of Jesus, and the vision of a new heaven and new earth in Revelation. This comprehensive look at the biblical story reveals God's deep love for all of creation, including each child. *Great Big Beautiful World* invites children to see the ways God cares for the earth and challenges them to be part of caring for and preserving the created world.

Each day starts with relationship-building, joint worship, music, prayer, and a dramatic presentation of the Bible story. This is a time to SOW seeds of friendship, joy, generosity, and wisdom. These seeds will GROW as children explore, create, play, and learn about God's story at three response stations. In closing worship, children will be challenged to GO out into the world to care for the beautiful world God made.

SOW (35 min) <i>Children start in small groups and then gather for worship.</i>	GROW (90 min + snack) <i>Small groups rotate between three activity stations and have a snack.</i>	GO (10 min) <i>The large group gathers for worship and dismissal.</i>
Seeds of Friendship (10 min) (small group) Seeds of Joy (10 min) (large group, music, prayer) Seeds of Generosity (5 min) (offering) Seeds of Wisdom (10 min) (Bible memory, Bible drama)	Dig In (30 min) (Bible study) Create & Discover (30 min) (art and science activities) Sprout (30 min) (active games) Snack Time (15 min)	Songs Creation Care Cards Closing Prayer Dismissal

Items you will need from the VBS kit:

- Dig In Leader Guide
- Dig In electronic files
- Dig In Area Poster

You will also need one *Creation Connection* student booklet for each child.

The **electronic files** include teaching aids to accompany the leader guide. Each Dig In Leader should be given access to the relevant files to print pages for the chosen activities. The Dig In folder includes the following:

- Day 1 Bible Story Script
- Day 2 Nature Finger Puppets
- Day 2 & Day 5 Play Dough and Salt Dough Recipes
- Days 2–5 Bible Memory Strips

- Day 3 Wheat Bingo Gameboards
- Day 3 Calling Cards

Media Connections are included in each session and are posted on the “Great Big Beautiful World VBS” board on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page for ease of use, organized by day (<https://pinterest.com/GrowingUpCatholic/great-big-beautiful-world-ybs>). Additional songs and videos are also included on Pinterest.

WELCOME TO DIG IN!

Dig In is one of three 30-minute **GROW** response stations following **SOW** (opening worship). Each Dig In session includes four parts: Connect, Encounter, Explore, and Bless.

Each session plan also includes a **Bible essay** to read in preparation for leading, and an **At-a-Glance Chart** to aid in planning.

CONNECT

Each session begins by helping children connect to each other through “get to know you” activities, connect to God through prayer, and connect to the Bible through memorization of several verses. The Bible memory passage is Psalm 52:8b–9. The passage is introduced during **SOW** (opening worship) and reviewed during Dig In.

I trust in God’s constant love forever and ever. I will always thank you, God, for what you have done; in the presence of your people I will proclaim that you are good.

—Psalm 52:8b–9 (GNT)

ENCOUNTER

There are two options for retelling the Bible story. Choose one that works best for your group based on the age, interests, and attention span of the children. Following the story, there are Dig In and Live It questions that will help children engage with the story and see the ways it relates to their own experiences. Children will then complete activities in the *Creation Connection* student booklet. Be sure to have one booklet for each child.

EXPLORE

Choose from among three Explore activities and a list of Media Connections as time allows.

BLESS

Send the children to the next response station with a prayer of blessing.

SETTING UP

It will be helpful to have two main spaces in the Dig In area—one section with a table and chairs so that children can complete student booklet pages and other activities, and the second section with an open area where children can sit on the floor or have room to move. If possible, have a small book corner where you can place the recommended nature books every day. Read the daily plans carefully so that you know the space that is needed for activities, and plan accordingly.

Decorate the room with nature items, creation-related photographs, and one or more trees or potted plants. There are many decorating ideas available on the “Great Big Beautiful World VBS” board on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page (<https://pinterest.com/GrowingUpCatholic/great-big-beautiful-world-vbs>).

Planning and Leading a Session

The 30-minute time frame may be broken down as follows (modify as needed):

- **Connect:** 5–7 minutes
- **Encounter:** 10–12 minutes
- **Explore:** 10 minutes
- **Bless:** 2–3 minutes

There are more activities in the session plan than can be completed in 30 minutes. This is meant to give you options and flexibility. You may want to use a highlighter and mark the portions of the session you will definitely use, and star items you will do if there is additional time.

All of the Explore activities can be done as a large group or can often be set up as separate stations for children to rotate through. It’s recommended to have more than one Explore activity ready. A group may move through an activity quickly due to excitement or abilities and it will be useful to have something else to do. Keep children aware of the time, giving reminders about how much time is left for Explore.

Creating a Safe, Welcoming Environment

Many behavior problems can be prevented by thorough planning, approaching children as individuals, and teaching according to developmental, emotional, and educational abilities.

- **Establish rules.** It is important to set rules, such as “Be respectful,” “Be kind,” and “Be safe.” Rules need to be simple and number no more than three. This lets children know what is and is not acceptable. Be consistent in making sure children follow the rules, and determine ahead of time how you will handle misbehavior.
- **Speak calmly and respectfully.** Your tone of voice and choice of words are important when giving instructions, redirecting behavior, and communicating with individual children. This sets an example of how you want the children to interact with each other. Use children’s names when speaking to them. This shows that you know and respect them as individuals.
- **Have fun!** When you show enthusiasm for the Bible story and accompanying activities, children will be drawn into your excitement. This creates a joyful, worshipful atmosphere.

Using *Creation Connection* Student Booklets

The *Creation Connection* student booklet is a highly recommended part of the Encounter portion of the session. Each day includes a simple retelling of the story and related activities. One activity page is geared toward younger children and one toward older children, although activities can be completed by everyone.

Each student booklet contains Creation Care Cards (pages 11–14) that are sent home Days 1–4. These cards contain activities to encourage children and their families to learn about, experience, and care for God’s world together. The cards will be distributed at closing worship each day, so remove all the cards from the middle of each booklet, cut them apart, and organize them by day.

Using Media Connections

Each session includes a variety of books, videos, and websites to extend children’s understanding of the Bible story. These can be used in a variety of ways:

- Set up a book corner for children to read books independently.
- Set up a media center with a laptop or tablet that has the chosen videos or websites bookmarked. Monitor this area to be sure children use only the chosen materials.
- Show a video or read a book to the entire group.

Be sure to preview both books and videos to make sure they will work for the children in your group. Queue videos to avoid watching ads.

A comprehensive booklist is included in the electronic files. Ask a volunteer to go to the library and gather books for the entire week. The local librarian would likely be able to recommend other books that would relate to the daily topics.

Media Connections are posted on the “Great Big Beautiful World VBS” board on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page for ease of use, organized by day (<https://pinterest.com/GrowingUpCatholic/great-big-beautiful-world-vbs>).

General Supplies

Have these general supplies on hand for use throughout the week:

- Bible(s)
- Creation Connection* student booklets (one per child)
- Pencils, pens, crayons
- Paper
- Eight shoeboxes or another type of box for Bible memory
- Media player with Internet connection

DAY 1

GOD CREATES

Scripture Text: Genesis 2:4b–23

Laudato Si': #62-69, 75

Seed of Faith: God created a beautiful world.

Story Summary:

From the dust, God formed and breathed life into a person. Then God made every tree and a river that flowed from Eden. God planted a garden in Eden as a home for all created things. God gave instructions to care for the garden and to eat the fruit from every tree except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God made all the animals and brought them to the person to be named. While the man slept, God took one of his ribs and created a woman as a helper and companion.

Bible Essay:

As we prepare to share God's *Great Big Beautiful World* with children, we begin at the very beginning—in the book of Genesis. We are perhaps more familiar with the creation story from Genesis 1, where God speaks creation into being and pronounces it good, but we have chosen to focus on the second account of creation in Genesis 2. Here, we see a more intimate view of God's handiwork.

God's hands get dirty in this creation story! God forms a human being out of the dirt and breathes life into him. God creates trees and plants, and then rivers of water to nourish them. God plants a garden in Eden to be a home for the man and instructs him “to till it and keep it,” not to “dominate and subdue” it as some have wrongly interpreted before (*LS* #66-67). God invites the man to join in the creative process and gives him the fruit of all the trees—except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

All is not good in this story, for God sees that the man is alone. God creates animals and brings them to the man to name, but none among these is a suitable partner for the man. So God creates a woman from a rib taken from the man's side. The man and woman live together in the garden, caring for and enjoying God's beautiful world.

Children can easily relate to a God who digs in the dirt, forming animals and people. They can imagine kneeling beside God, getting their hands dirty, and squealing with delight at what they create. Like a loving parent, God provides a safe and comfortable home for the man and woman and attends to their needs. As you dig into this story with children, help them to notice the many good things in this beautiful world that God has created.

Children are typically on the receiving end of caregiving. Parents, teachers, trusted adults, and extended family members care for children's daily needs. This story invites children to consider how *they* can become caregivers for creation. Just like the first person in the garden, we too have a responsibility to tend to the world God made (*LS* #68-69).

Day 1 At-a-Glance

Advance Preparation

- Read Genesis 2:4b–23 and the Bible essay for Day 1 on page 6 of this guide.
- Pray for the children and adults who will participate in VBS today.
- Read through the Dig In session plan and decide which activities you will use. Be sure to have one *Creation Connection* student booklet for each child.
- Communicate with volunteers about their roles and tasks.
- Create a worship area where children can gather in a circle.

	SUPPLIES	TO DO
CONNECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dig In Area Poster • Beanbag or ball 	Hang up the Dig In Area Poster from the VBS kit.
ENCOUNTER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Creation Connection</i> student booklets • Day 1 Bible Story Script (electronic files) or Bible • Supplies for chosen storytelling option 	<p>Choose one of the options for retelling the Bible story and gather needed supplies.</p> <p>Practice telling the Bible story.</p>
EXPLORE & BLESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplies for chosen activities 	<p>Preview and select Media Connections.</p> <p>Choose Explore activities based on the age and interests of children, the amount of time you have, and available supplies.</p> <p>Check books out of the library.</p>

SESSION PLAN

CONNECT

Welcome children and gather in a circle. Briefly introduce yourself and play a name game. Toss a bean bag to someone across the circle from you and say, “My name is _____. What’s your name?” Continue this around the circle until everyone has been introduced. Start another round and invite children to say their name again and their favorite animal.

Pray:

God, thank you for this amazing day to learn about and care for your creation. Thank you for each person who has joined us today. Amen.

Read the Bible memory passage below. Explain that this verse is found in the book of Psalms, a collection of prayers and songs in the Old Testament.

I trust in God’s constant love forever and ever. I will always thank you, God, for what you have done; in the presence of your people I will proclaim that you are good.

—Psalm 52:8b–9 (GNT)

We don’t often sing these psalms as people did in the past, however, speaking them with rhythms can help us learn and remember the words of the psalmist. Have children repeat each short section of the first sentence of the verse after you. Pat your legs or clap your hands for each syllable. Do this several times.

I trust in God’s
constant love
forever and ever.

Teaching Tips

Elementary-aged children are typically on the receiving end of caregiving. Parents, teachers, trusted adults, and extended family members care for their daily needs. Today’s session invites children to consider how *they* can become caregivers for creation. Just like the first people in the garden, we too have a responsibility to tend the world God made. Encourage children to share examples of ways they take care of plants or animals. Challenge them to find a way to care for creation in the coming week. Small actions can add up to big changes.

Be creative with the storytelling supplies and choose items that are readily accessible. For Bible storytelling option 1, cloth could be replaced with bulletin board paper, blankets, sheets, or props borrowed from the opening drama. Add or subtract elements as needed, depending on the number of children in each group. Children can wrap themselves up in green fabric or use other costumes to become trees; provide silk or plastic flowers for color and greenery. Instead of using stuffed animals, use animal masks.

ENCOUNTER

Bible Storytelling Option 1

Supplies:

- Day 1 Bible Story Script (electronic files) or Bible
- One large piece and four smaller pieces of blue cloth, brown cloth, green cloth,
- Plastic or real fruit
- Stuffed animal toys

Let individual or pairs of children choose a piece of cloth to represent different parts of creation: blue for rivers (one large and four smaller pieces), green for grass, brown for earth. Designate a child as the Tree Person who will stand like a tree, holding pieces of plastic fruit. (Real bananas or oranges could also be used.) Designate two children to be the created people, Person 1 and Person 2. Have stuffed animal toys available as well. Read the Day 1 Bible Story Script from the electronic files, cueing children when to move and add props. The verses are included below in case you wish to read it from a different translation.

Genesis 2:4b–23

- Read verses 4b–5. (*Add brown cloth to make earth.*)
- Read verse 6. (*Lay out a large blue cloth to make a river.*)
- Read verse 7. (*Have Person 1 stand on the brown cloth.*)
- Read verses 8–9. (*Add green cloth to be grass and have Person 1 move there; have the person pretending to be a tree stand on the green cloth.*)
- Read verses 10–14. (*Lay four smaller blue cloths at the end of the large blue cloth to make rivers.*)
- Read verses 15–17. (*Give the Tree Person plastic or real pieces of fruit to hold.*)
- Read verses 18–20. (*Add stuffed animal toys.*)
- Read verses 21–23. (*Have Person 2 stand near Person 1.*)

Bible Storytelling Option 2

Supplies:

- Day 1 Bible Story Script (electronic files) or Bible, poster board, markers

Optional Supplies:

- Magazine pictures of plants and animals, glue stick

Create a visual story. Hang up a piece of white poster board. Have children gather on the floor near it. Read Genesis 2:4b–23 from the Day 1 Bible Story Script from the electronic files or from a Bible. Invite one child to draw each part of creation on the poster board as you read the story. Do not force children to draw if they don't feel comfortable doing so. Encourage children to keep the drawings simple. You may want to have some magazine pictures of trees, flowers, or animals to glue onto the poster board for those who don't like to draw.

ENCOUNTER

Dig In

Ask several wondering questions about the Bible story. Allow time between each question for children to think and respond.

- Imagine watching God create a person from soil.
- I wonder what the person did to take care of the garden.
- I wonder what types of animals God made. How many animals and birds do you think God made?
- I wonder if God created things in their adult or mature form or did the trees start as seedlings and animals start as babies. I wonder if everything grew slowly or quickly.
- Imagine that God is breathing life into you, just as God breathed life into the first person.

Live It

Connect the Bible story to children's lives by asking some or all of these questions. Allow time between each question for children to think and respond.

- Which part of the story do you think is most important?
- God created a partner for the first person. Who is a helpful friend to you?
- I wonder how we can care for the animals, plants, and trees.
- Which part of creation do you think is very beautiful?

Creation Connection Student Booklets

Have children write their name on page 2 of the *Creation Connection* student booklet. Introduce Kai, the water droplet, also on that page. Older children can work on the cryptogram on page 4. The key to the code is to number the alphabet backwards. The solution is "We can care for God's creation." Younger children can work on the Water Watch matching activity on page 5.

EXPLORE

Discover

Go on a short sensory nature walk. Invite children to walk in pairs and explore what God has made that they can hear (*birds, wind*), see (*sun, trees, ants*), smell (*flowers, moist dirt*), and touch (*grass, leaves*). Gather as a group before going back inside. Encourage children to name one thing they discovered from each category—hearing, sight, smell, and touch.

Indoor alternative: Have children listen to a recording or video of nature sounds and see if they can identify the source of the sound (*bird, ocean, wind*). Have children look out a window and list how many items they can see that God made (*rain, clouds, grass, trees*). The Nat Geo Wild video in Media Connections would also work well here.

Supplies

- Video or recording of nature sounds (optional)

Media Connections

- *In Every Tiny Grain of Sand: A Child's Book of Prayers and Praise* collected by Reeve Lindbergh (read “The Earth” section)
- *Wangari's Trees of Peace* by Jeanette Winter
- *Morning Has Broken* by Eleanor Farjeon
- *Adam & Eve's First Sunset: God's New Day* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
- *Glory* by Nancy White Carlstrom
- *One Small Square: Backyard* by Donald M. Silver

BLESS

Gather children and pray:

God, you made the bright sun that warms us and the green trees that shade us. You made amazing animals and birds. We praise you for your amazing creation. Help us take care of the beautiful world you made. Amen.

Move

In today's story God asked the first human to name the animals. Play a version of “Duck, Duck, Goose.” Instead of the usual names of duck or goose, ask the children to say a pattern of three animals, such as lizard, eagle, antelope. They can interrupt this pattern whenever they choose by saying “human.” When “human” is named, the caller starts running around the circle while “human” tries to tag the caller before the caller reaches the empty seat. If tagged, the caller continues in that role. If “human” is unsuccessful in tagging the caller, “human” then becomes the caller.

Care for Creation

Water is a vital natural resource. Watch a video related to water poverty, such as “Watering Malawi: 2017 Passport Camp Mission Offering (Video 2).” Children could also research the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, both of which are named in Genesis 2. Look at a map to locate them and do an image search for pictures of the rivers. Learn about the ways these rivers have been polluted by war waste, oil, and industrial waste, greatly impacting those who use the river for drinking water and fishing.

- “Amazing Nature Scenery” by Arm Entertainments (YouTube)
- “You'll Never Guess Which Animals Make These Sounds” by Nat Geo Wild (YouTube)
- “Creation Calls” song by Brian Doerksen (many versions on YouTube)
- “Watering Malawi: 2017 Passport Camp Mission Offering (Video 2)” by PASSPORT Camps (YouTube)



Day 1 Bible Story Script

^{4b} When the Lord God made the heavens and the earth, ⁵ no grass or plants were growing anywhere. God had not yet sent any rain, and there was no one to work the land. (*Add brown cloth to make the earth.*)

⁶ But streams came up from the ground and watered the earth. (*Lay out a large blue cloth to make water.*)

⁷ The Lord God took a handful of soil and made a man. God breathed life into the man, and the man started breathing. (*Have Person 1 stand on the brown cloth.*)

⁸ The Lord made a garden in a place called Eden, which was in the east, and he put the man there. (*Add green cloth to be grass. Have Person 1 move to the green cloth.*) ⁹ The Lord God placed all kinds of beautiful trees and fruit trees in the garden. (*Have the person pretending to be a tree stand on the green cloth.*) Two other trees were in the middle of the garden. One of the trees gave life—the other gave the power to know the difference between right and wrong.

¹⁰ From Eden a river flowed out to water the garden, then it divided into four rivers. ¹¹ The first one is the Pishon River that flows through the land of Havilah, ¹² where pure gold, rare perfumes, and precious stones are found. ¹³ The second is the Gihon River that winds through Ethiopia. ¹⁴ The Tigris River that flows east of Assyria is the third, and the fourth is the Euphrates River. (*Lay four smaller blue cloths at the end of the large blue cloth to make rivers.*)

¹⁵ The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to take care of it and to look after it. ¹⁶ But the Lord told him, “You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden, ¹⁷ except the one that has the power to let you know the difference between right and wrong. If you eat any fruit from that tree, you will die before the day is over!” (*Give the tree person plastic or real pieces of fruit to hold.*)

¹⁸ The Lord God said, “It isn’t good for the man to live alone. I need to make a suitable partner for him.” ¹⁹⁻²⁰ So the Lord took some soil and made animals and birds. (*Add stuffed animal toys.*) He brought them to the man to see what names he would give each of them. Then the man named the tame animals and the birds and the wild animals. That’s how they got their names. None of these was the right kind of partner for the man.

²¹ So the Lord God made him fall into a deep sleep, and he took out one of the man’s ribs. Then after closing the man’s side, ²² the Lord made a woman out of the rib.

The Lord God brought her to the man, (*have Person 2 stand next to Person 1*) ²³ and the man exclaimed, “Here is someone like me! She is part of my body, my own flesh and bones. She came from me, a man. So I will name her Woman!”

—Genesis 2:4b–23 (CEV)