



## CREATIVE RESPONSE GUIDE

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Printed in United States of America  
Cover design by Reuben Graham  
Cover photo by Design Pics / Thinkstock  
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# Introduction

Listen up! Dig deep! Jesus had a lot to say. And those who listened discovered a treasure in his words.

At first, Jesus' parables seem simple. Of course we know that the type of soil in which seeds are sown is important for plants to grow, but what does that have to do with us? And if someone asked us for food, we wouldn't be rude and give a stone instead! Or, what if we lost something important to us? Of course we would look high and low and celebrate when it was found.

It turns out, however, that the parables have a greater meaning beyond what we first see. So come along, listen, and dig deeper for the treasures of the kingdom of heaven!

Each session plan includes the day's Scripture, Bible background, purpose statement, and Bible memory passage. Read over these sections so that you are familiar with the focus of the day. All VBS leader guides include this information so that the activities and discussions will reflect the day's themes.

## Snack

Snack suggestions are offered each day. They go along with the Bible stories in some way so that children can better remember the parables and themes of the day. Some snacks need to be chosen in advance so that foods can be made or ordered.

Invite adults and youth who are not otherwise involved in VBS to prepare the snacks and clean up afterward. Have napkins or small plates on hand, as well as cups for juice or water. Make sure children either wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before eating.

► **Be aware of anyone with food allergies or gluten intolerance. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.**

## Crafts

Several craft options are given each day. Read them carefully and choose the options that will work best for your groups, considering the children's ages and abilities. Each of the options uses easy-to-find materials; you may want to have someone who is not otherwise involved in VBS collect the materials you will need each day.

Make the crafts ahead of time so that you understand the directions. Show your craft to the children as a sample of what they will make. Do not expect children to make their crafts identical to yours; instead, allow children to use their creativity during this time. Choose one craft for everyone to do, or set up craft stations around the room and allow children to choose which craft they would like to make. Some crafts require more adult supervision than others, particularly with younger groups, so invite youth and adults to help you.

Pay attention to how your meeting space is set up. It is ideal to have at least two areas or tables—one for snacks and another for crafts—if space is available.

# Worship Art Display Banner

This is an optional activity for a worship banner that will be displayed in the Worship space. On Days 1–4, the children will make a “secret” craft that has something to do with the next day’s parable. Children can try to figure out the link, but will ultimately not know the full reason for the craft until the next day, when the secret is revealed and understood as they listen to the parable during Worship time.

Be sure to work with the Worship leader if you want children to work on this project. Instructions for making craft items for the banner are included in the Creative Response daily plan.

The banner can be created from a large sheet of paper or cloth. Items will need to be attached with glue or tape. The size of the banner can be altered depending on the space in the Worship time area. Keep in mind that four days’ worth of crafts will be added to the banner—when determining its size, take into consideration the number of children and the size of the items that they will make.

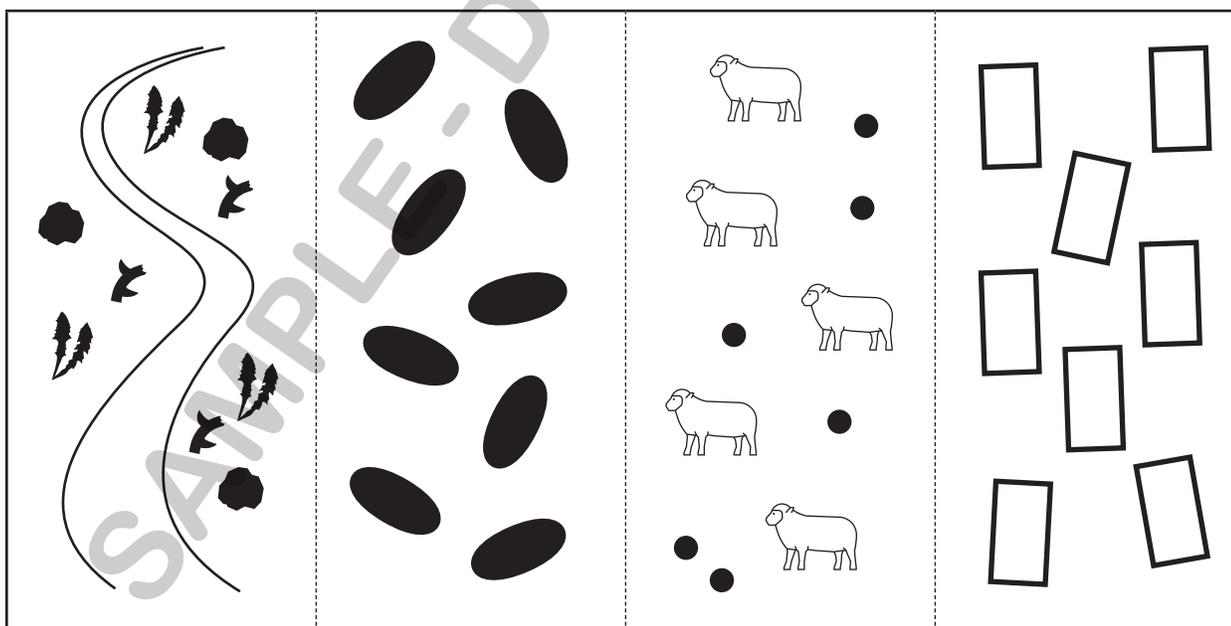
Things to consider:

- **The banner will need to be accessed before each Worship time** to add the children’s crafts that represent the parable for that day.
- **It will need to be large enough** to accommodate four days of crafts by each child.
- **It will need to be made of a material** to which crafts can be glued or taped.

The banner will feature:

- **Day 1:** blank
- **Day 2:** on about one-quarter of the banner, create a scene with a path and attach the rock, thorn, and weed crafts made on Day 1
- **Day 3:** on about one-quarter of the banner, add the bread and plant/tree crafts the children made on Day 2
- **Day 4:** on about one-quarter of the banner, add the sheep and coins that the children made on Day 3
- **Day 5:** on about one-quarter of the banner, attach the doors that the children made on Day 4

► You may want to check with a local printer that prints billboards. If mistakes have been made on a billboard and it is unusable, or if they have extra pieces, this material would work well for the banner.



# Daily schedule

Schedule is for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session as follows:

## Gather

(10 minutes)

Small groups meet to begin the session.

## Worship

(25 minutes)

Small groups gather for worship. The parables are presented through a drama.

## Bible/Creative/ Active Response

(30 minutes each)

Small groups rotate to participate in three stations each day. Activities focus on Bible story themes. Creative Response time includes a snack.

## Send

(10 minutes)

Small groups gather for a sending blessing and dismissal.

## Modified schedule

### If you have 2 hours:

Gather—5 to 10 minutes

Worship—25 minutes

Respond—75 minutes

Active—25 minutes

Bible—25 minutes

Creative—25 minutes

Send—5 to 10 minutes

### If you have 1½ hours:

Gather—5 minutes

Worship—20 minutes

Respond—60 minutes

Active—20 minutes

Bible—20 minutes

Creative—20 minutes

Send—5 minutes

### If you have 1 hour:

Worship—15 minutes

Respond—45 minutes

Active—15 minutes

Bible—15 minutes

Creative—15 minutes

# Day 1

# It's a Secret

## Bible background

Jesus sometimes told stories in the form of parables. Parables use common objects and concepts to point toward a deeper meaning. Today's text is a brief introduction as to why Jesus spoke this way. And just as the parables themselves need to be unpacked to become clear, so too today's texts need to be unpacked.

The parables seem a bit mysterious. The reason Jesus gives for speaking in parables seems equally mysterious: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven."

The verses between today's texts follow this comment by noting that some people see and hear, but they don't understand. However, at the end of today's text, Jesus adds, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear."

What does all this mean? What do eyes and ears and the kingdom of heaven have to do with stories about everyday items?

Just as the everyday items are with us, so the kingdom of heaven is here among us. Though at first it might not have been apparent to those around Jesus, if they watched and listened, they would have seen that the kingdom of heaven was not only present, but also growing. Just as the parables are not understood at the first hearing, so the kingdom of heaven is not always understood or visible to those who may be searching for it.

The kingdom of heaven did not arrive with all the pomp and circumstance that the people of Jesus' day expected. Instead, it arrived in a humble way. Though it began small, it would become so large that it would offer salvation and eternal life to those who believed. All people needed to do to notice was to open their eyes and their ears. The secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given. God will help people understand.

Today's texts will encourage children to notice what is around them so that they can better understand what Jesus said. They too can unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven if they notice the way people around them follow Jesus. Do they hear kind words spoken? Do they see caring gestures from one person to another?

As a leader, you have the honor of helping children see and hear the kingdom of heaven around them. Take a moment to ask for God's help as you lead vacation Bible school.



## Today's Bible experience

Matthew 13:10-11a, 16

## Purpose statement

God will help us understand.

## Summary

The disciples ask Jesus why he speaks in parables, and Jesus explains that it is so they can know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.

## Bible memory

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. —1 John 4:7-9

## Session materials

- Snack
- Napkins or small plates
- Juice or water, cups
- Hand sanitizer or wet wipes
- Materials for chosen activities (pp. 7-8)

## Advance preparation

- Pray for everyone involved in Bible school—adults as they prepare and lead, and children as they learn.
- Read Matthew 13:10-11a, 16. Read over the Creative Response daily plan and choose activities appropriate for your VBS groups. Prepare materials.
- Make craft samples ahead of time to be sure you understand the directions, and so that children can see what they will make.
- Prepare snack.

## Daily plan

► **Be aware of anyone with food allergies or gluten intolerance. Have alternative foods on hand, if needed.**

1. **Greet the children.** Welcome them to the first day of vacation Bible school! Explain that during this time they will enjoy a snack and make crafts that go along with the Bible story.  
Ask children about their previous VBS session: What did they do? What was their favorite part? What did they learn?
2. **Share a snack.** Choose one of the options listed, or use your own idea to create a snack with a “surprise” inside. Pass out plates, napkins, and cups of water or juice. Have children wash their hands, or provide hand sanitizer for children to use before eating.
3. **Make the Worship Art Display Banner craft** of the day (*optional*). Explain that each day children will make a secret craft that has something to do with the next day’s parable. It is a secret because children may not understand why they are making the craft, but the reason will be revealed the next day during Worship time. As the children listen to the parable, the craft’s meaning will be understood.  
Children may begin working on this craft after they finish eating their snack. See directions for this craft in the Creative options section (p. 7).
4. **Do creative activities** that go along with the day’s story. Explain that the activities will help everyone to better understand the parables Jesus told.
5. **Allow time for children to clean up.** Explain expectations for cleaning the areas and putting projects away. Decide if projects will be taken home, displayed, or collected for other purposes. Make sure all projects have names on them.
6. **Offer a closing prayer.** Before praying, instruct children to touch their eyes and ears when they hear those words in the prayer. Pray:

*Dear God, bless these ears to hear and bless these eyes to see as we dig for treasure and learn the secrets of your kingdom this week. Amen.*

## Snack options

1. Bake a cake or make another food that has a secret/surprise ingredient. A simple chocolate cake recipe can be found on page 72 in the *Simply in Season Children's Cookbook* (Herald Press, 2006) or in *Treasure Map*, page 23. (The secret ingredient is beets!)
2. Serve Bible verse fortune cookies. They can be found through an Internet search.
3. Bake cookies with a piece of candy inside—before baking, roll the cookie dough around a small piece of candy and bake according to recipe directions.

**Think about it:** The secrets of the God's kingdom can be revealed to us through the parables. Do you know there is a secret ingredient in your snack? It's waiting to be revealed as you eat it!

## Creative options

### Worship Art Display Banner Craft

*(needed for Day 2: rocks, thorns, weeds)*

#### Materials

- Rock, thorn, and weed templates from page 9
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Markers
- Tape or glue

In preparation, make copies of the rock, thorn, and weed templates.

1. Allow time for children to create rocks, thorns, and/or weeds from the supplied materials. The items may be decorated and then cut out for use on the banner.
2. If children do not want to design their own, they may trace the rock, thorn, or weed templates.

**Think about it:** We learned that God has blessed our ears and our eyes with the ability to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. The rock, thorns, and weeds are not in today's story, but they are in the story for Day 2 of vacation Bible school. They are a secret that will be revealed tomorrow.

### Sifting Sand Treasures

#### Materials

- Sandbox filled with sand
- Small items (treasures) to hide in sand, such as stickers, shiny stones, or other items (one item per child)
- Sand shovels
- Screens or other sifters

In preparation, hide the treasures inside the sandbox.

1. Demonstrate how to use the sand shovels to scoop sand onto a screen and shake the screen in order to find treasures.
2. After children find a treasure, they may help others find a treasure too. Or they can be creative and use the sand to build treasures in the sandbox.

**Think about it:** Did you know what to expect when you started digging in the sand? How exciting was it to uncover a treasure? That's how excited we can be about the many treasures we find in the parables in the Bible! There's always something exciting to explore!

## What's the Picture?

### Materials

- White paper
- White crayons
- Watercolor paint or poster paint, watered down
- Paintbrushes
- Painting smocks
- Newspaper

In preparation, place newspaper on the work space. Children should wear painting smocks.

1. Have children use white crayons to draw pictures on the white paper. The pictures will not be visible.
2. Paint over the drawing using one or several colors. Watch the drawing appear!

**Think about it:** The drawing was like a secret treasure that no one could see! Yet it was still there, just waiting to be revealed. That's what the parables are like. There's a lot of treasure in them just waiting to be revealed to us. That's why we come to vacation Bible school! We want to learn more about the treasures in the parables Jesus told.

## Secret Designs

### Materials

- Plain white paper towels or round coffee filters
- Water
- Food coloring
- Muffin tins or other small containers
- Painting smocks
- Newspaper

In preparation, place newspaper on the work space. Mix together water and food coloring, and place different-colored water in each section of a muffin tin or other containers. Children should wear painting smocks so that food coloring does not get on their clothing.

1. Give each child a paper towel or coffee filter. Demonstrate how to fold the paper towel or filter into fourths, then use a diagonal fold so that it is in the shape of a triangle.
2. Children should gently dip each corner into the colored water. They may dip their triangle into only one color if they prefer, or make it as colorful as possible.
3. Unfold the paper towels or filters and allow to dry.

**Think about it:** No matter how you dipped it, you made a colorful design! Yet you didn't know what the design would look like until you unfolded the paper towel or coffee filter. When you unfolded it, it was as if a secret treasure was revealed; a treasure of beauty that you didn't even realize was happening. That's how God helps us to understand things. We can know a little bit, but there is much more to learn if we are open to what God wants us to understand.

# Day 1 reproducibles

