

# Theme Class

## Theme Class Area

Design your theme class room as a “Creation Room’ with big leafy trees, gardens of flowers and vegetables, a dark ceiling with stars (cover with dark construction paper with stick-on “glow in the dark” stars), a large ball un) on one wall, etc. Create this place to be special, like a garden or rainforest.

## Day One: Garden Earth

In God’s awesome act of creation, a universe of purpose, interdependence, diversity, stewardship, love, and continual rebirth surrounds us. Despite differing creation stories and scientific theories, the truth of God’s love and purpose for the earth and humanity comes through, calling us to be co-creators with God.

## To the Teacher: God & Science

Today’s theme is to emphasize God’s awesome act of creation, the creation of the perfect “garden,” providing a place of joy, stewardship, interdependence and love for all of God’s creatures.

Children are learning the Big Bang and other theories in schools, and they question where the biblical creation story fits in. They might even feel they need to “choose” between believing in God or in science. This is just not the case. They should be affirmed that God has created according to natural laws. Scientific theories do not have to be contradictory to scriptural creation stories that acknowledge a God (and Christ) who thought and created in spirit before creating physically. Perhaps God created the universe in an “explosion” of thought (Big Bang theory) creating light, life, and substance from a formless void.

There are several scientific explanations of creation. To make things more confusing, there are several versions of the creation story, too. The early Hebrews and other ancient people in diverse places had stories of creation to help them understand God. Out of chaos and emptiness, God created the beautiful earth. The Hebrews believed the most beautiful part of the earth, God’s garden, was called Eden.

The story of creation received from the Hebrews was more than four thousand years old when it was finally written down. Even then two different creation stories emerged from the oral history of the people. One was written sometime after the reign of King Solomon, first by a writer in the Southern Kingdom and later by a writer working in the Northern Kingdom. After the Babylonian captivity, the priestly editors re-worked the Northern Kingdom version which eventually became the first creation story in our printed Bible. Joseph Smith, Jr., expanded the creation stories by adding many additional verses to the Book of Genesis in what would later become the Inspired Version.

Our image of Eden, a beautiful garden, is symbolic of the creation of a perfectly harmonious, interdependent, and nurturing world for God’s creations. Eden is our earth, a garden among planets. It is a place where natural laws of science, diversity, interdependence purpose, and stewardship exist. Younger campers should hear again the biblical creation story and discover that the biblical creation story and scientific theories can fit together like pieces of a puzzle (even

if some pieces are missing still). Older campers can study to understand the many biblical versions of the creation story. The basic principle that emerges is that God created a universe which follows natural laws to provide an environment for all creatures. Science and God are not mutually exclusive. In fact, science proves the marvel and wonder of God.

### ***What's in a Garden?***

**Materials:** crayons or markers, drawing paper

In groups, give campers large drawing paper and crayons or markers. Instruct them to draw a garden any type, including as many things as they can think of that are included in a garden. Have them display their drawings and discuss:

#### **Discussion:**

- What is your definition of a garden?
- What do these gardens have in common?
- Who decides what goes into the garden plot? Who plants them?
- Who maintains them?
- What conditions are necessary for a successful garden?

### **For older campers...**

**Materials:** pens or pencils, markers, flip chart paper, tape, self-sticking note pads, scriptures  
Hand out self-sticking notes pads and pens or pencils to each camper. Give campers three minutes to write on separate self-sticking notes everything they can think of that is found in a garden. During the three minutes, hang several sheets of flip chart paper. Ask one camper to share one of his or her notes. Label the first sheet of paper with the name of a type of garden (see below) where the first suggested item would likely be found. Write the item under the heading and hand the marker to someone to continue with that garden list, and call for another camper to share. As different gardens emerge, make new headings and assign someone new to add items to that list as they are named. If a question arises, let the group decide. Some items may be found in more than one type of garden.

Possible headings are VEGETABLE, FLOWER, FRUIT, HERB, CACTUS, ROCK, BUTTERFLY, ROSE, BOTANICAL, PRAIRIE GRASS, JAPANESE, MEDITATION, CYPRESS, KINDER (GARDEN), and so on.

#### **Discussion:**

Use the following questions as a bridge to the next activity.

- What do you know about the story of creation? What was created when, where, why?
- What scientific theories of creation have you learned in school?
- How do the two fit together, or do they?

### **God's Garden**

How is our garden like the earth that God created? (Ideas may range from: you planned what went in it, you used a lot of colors to make it attractive, and you planted your favorite things.)

#### **Discussion:**

- What have you learned in school about how the universe began? What facts do you know?
- How do they fit with what you know about God?
- Do you think we can believe in a God who created the universe but also believe that the universe began with a Big Bang, or some other way?

**Creation Story** (for older campers)

Divide campers into four groups, assigning each group one of the creation stories printed on the cards on the next two page (give each group a copy of one of these). After they have studied their creation theories follow with these instructions:

**Middle School/Junior High Ages:** Each group will design and present a skit to explain your group’s theory of creation. Then lead a discussion of your theory with the entire group.

**High School/senior High Ages:** Select two representatives from each group to form a panel to share their information. A moderator, either the class instructor or another camper, can ask questions or the entire group can ask questions.

# Group 1:

## The Common Story of Creation

Genesis 1:1-5	first day
Genesis 1:6-8	second day
Genesis 1:9-13	third day
Genesis 1:14-19	fourth day
Genesis 1:20-23	fifth day
Genesis 1:24-31	sixth day
Genesis2:1-4a	seventh day

References: New Revised Standard Version

- List the things created for each day.
- What view of God do you get from this story?
- What view of human kind do you get?

## Group 2

### Another Story of Creation

Genesis 2:4b-6	first step
Genesis 2:7-8	first person
Genesis 2:9-14	layout of garden
Genesis 2:15-25	stewards for earth

References: New Revised Standard Version

- List the things created for each day.
- What view of God do you get from this story?
- What view of humankind do you get?

## Group 3: Creation Story

From the Inspired Version of the Holy Scriptures

Genesis 1:1-3	direct action of God
Genesis 1:27	connection of God and Jesus in creation
Genesis 1:29-30	God and Jesus creating people as stewards
Genesis 2:5	spiritual creation
Genesis 2:11	spiritual things
Genesis 2:23	talking to Jesus

What additional explanations are given for the events of creation?

What understanding of God develops?

What is your understanding of stewardship as a human being?

Why might early people have thought of a special beautiful place as the garden of God?

How has our understanding of earth as a garden expanded?

What is your responsibility to Garden Earth?

# **Group 4:**

## **Scientific Theory of Creation**

available science books

Discuss the scientific view of creation that you learned in school.

What view of God do you get from these stories?

What view of humankind do you get?

What view of the earth do you get?

## Day Two: Earth Web

The interconnections and interdependence of life are through communities, biodiversity, and webs!

**Scripture:** the earth is full...there is enough and to spare

—Doctrine and Covenants 101:2f

### What good are...?

This game creates connections with life on the planet. Divide into teams. Someone from the first team draws a slip from a bowl and reads it. That team can play or pass. The team that begins names something good or necessary that object does. Then the second team must name something different. Play continues until a team can no longer think of good things. Then a second slip is drawn and the game continues. Choose from the following:

What good are...?

*insects* such as bees, ants, crickets, grasshoppers, mosquitoes, cockroaches

*animals* such as beavers, cats, dogs, mice, rabbits, skunks

*reptiles* such as snakes, alligators, turtles, lizards

*birds* such as hawks, robins, sparrows, wrens, vultures, hummingbirds

*flowers* such as blossoms, clover, orchids

*weeds* such as dandelions, thistles, milkweed

When the game has been played for a while, stop and talk about it. Were there only good things that came to mind for each item? Where did negative images come from? How did you learn things were bad or good in nature?

### Web of Life

Have campers sit in large circle, Tie one end of a ball of twine around first camper's wrist. First camper names a plant, insect, or animal that might be found in your campground, then rolls the ball to another camper. That camper names another plant, animal, or insect, wraps a loop of twine around her wrist, and rolls the ball to another. Continue until all campers are linked. Cut and tie off the string at the last camper. Ask if this "web" shows the interconnections of the ecosystem at camp? Have all campers lean back until the string is slightly taut (be careful that no one is hurt). Have all animals slightly tug, as others feel the effect on them. Then have all insects tug, and then all plants.

Does the tugging demonstrate the effect that we have on each other? Remove a few campers. What effect does this have on the whole ecosystem? Remove more. Does it make the web tighter or looser? Keep removing until the web is left lying on the ground. What can we say about the relationships in nature? What about the relationship we have with nature?

This activity was adapted from *Project Learning Tree, Environmental Education Activity Guide: Pre K-B* (Washington, DC: American Forest Foundation, 1993), 45.

## Scripture Study

As we learn more about our connection to the earth, our response as stewards and peacemakers becomes more positive. The early biblical people had an abundant earth to explore and use. Today the abundance depends on our willingness to share and use resources wisely. Ask someone to look up the scripture references in the Doctrine and Covenants and name the year the scripture was given.

### Discussion:

- What were conditions in the world at that time?
- How would the response of the people then and now be different?
- What point is Mosiah making in the two scriptures from the Book of Mormon?
- What was Paul trying to help the Corinthian church understand?

*Stewardship is the response of my people to the ministry of my Son...*

—Doctrine and Covenants 147:5a

*be in the world but not of it, living and acting honestly and honorably before God and in the sight of all...using the things of this world in the manner designed of God. . .*

— Doctrine and Covenants 128:8b,c

*the earth is full. . . there is enough and to spare. . .* —Doctrine and Covenants 101 :2f

*The lives of many are being sacrificed unnecessarily to the gods of war, greed, and avarice. The land is being desecrated by the thoughtless waste of vital resources. You must obey my commandments and be in the forefront of those who would mediate this needless destruction while them is yet day.*

—Doctrine and Covenants 150:7

*[God] is preserving you from day to day by lending you breath, that you may live and move and do according to your own will, and is even supporting you from one moment to another.*

—Mosiah 1:53

*For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same being, even God, for all the substance which we have. . .*

—Mosiah 2:32

*Do we all have the same gifts? No, for I have shown you a more excellent way.*

—I Corinthians 12:31 adapted

### Discussion:

- Where does your food come from?
- What is the source of fuel for your car?
- How is your home heated/cooled?
- Where do your clothes come from?
- Where does your water come from?
- What is the source of electricity?

If the source for any of these was interrupted, what would you do? What if you were cut off from any source of spiritual support and understanding: there were no more printed scriptures? no more church in which to meet? How would your life be different?

## **Web Prayer**

Have the group form a circle or form smaller circles of at least four persons holding hands. Have campers take turns praying, but during each prayer the camper must lean back supported by the others in the group.

## **Day Three: Earth Watch**

Stewardship and giftedness are learned in the story of the seed. Everything that we are and can become has been given us in our giftedness, in our seed. The story of the mustard seed is our story of great potential in a small beginning. Stewardship requires nurturing, development, maintenance of our gifts, and awareness and responsibility for the gifts around us.

### **Scripture:**

What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.  
—Luke 13:18-19 NRSV

### **Seed any good beans lately?**

**Materials:** fifteen bean soup mix or a variety of flower seeds, mustard seed, bird seed, masking tape, bowls

Mix the assorted beans and seeds together, placing some of each in a number of bowls. Divide the group according to the number of bowls of seeds you prepared. There should be no more than two to four campers working in a group. Explain the rules:

- Each bowl contains a variety of seeds.
- Each group has a strip of sticky tape.
- Find an example of as many different kinds of seeds as time allows.
- Arrange the sample seeds on the tape in descending order from largest to smallest.
- Clean up any spills.

**Optional Activity:** Gather seeds outside, stick them on a cardboard page, draw a picture of the “mother plant” from which you gathered them, and identify the type of plant they are.

### **Discussion:**

Call time after three to five minutes. Label each tape and hang them where they can be compared. Identify and discuss the various seeds. Who eats what? What do the plants look like? What conditions are needed for growth? What part does light or water play in the life of the plant? When is the seed harvested?

### **Scripture Study:**

Jesus used examples familiar to the people he was teaching. Seeds, gardens, sowing, planting, and harvesting were all themes used in lessons about God. In biblical times mustard seeds were planted and cultivated for eating and medicinal purposes. The seeds were harvested and ground into a powder. Although the mustard seed is not and was not the smallest of all seeds, it was remarkably small for the annual growth it produced, sometimes growing to six feet in a season.

Jesus was trying to help people understand how quickly things could change for the better. This plant grew so rapidly one could almost watch the action. The same was true, Jesus insisted, about the peace-filled world of God. He also used the mustard seed to teach a lesson of faith. People

had trouble believing in things they couldn't see. Jesus tried to tell them a little faith goes a long way.

### **Read the following scripture:**

...What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed **in the garden**; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches. —Luke 13:18-19 NRSV bold added

- What plants are you familiar with that compare to a mustard plant? (small seed, six-foot plant)
- Could birds nest in the plants you described? Would they want to?
- What kind of garden would a mustard seed be planted in if you knew it would grow to be the size of a tree?

### **Additional scriptures:**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. —Romans 15:13 N IV

The earth causes plants to grow, and a garden causes the seeds planted in it to grow. In the same way, the Lord God will make goodness and praise come from all the nations.

—Isaiah 61:11 Youth Bible (New Century Version)

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

—I Corinthians 3:6 N IV

Now I compare the word to a seed, If you give place for a seed to be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true and good seed, and if you do not cast it out by your unbelief, behold, it will begin to swell within you. And when you feel these swelling motions, you will say, "It must be a good seed for it begins to enlarge my soul, it enlightens my understanding, and it begins to be delicious to me. Now wouldn't this increase your faith? I say to you, Yes."

—Alma 16:152-155 adapted

### **Making Mustard**

Make mustard by grinding up mustard seeds into a flour, then adding cold water or grape juice, enough to make a paste. Within fifteen minutes, the chemical reaction starts and the true mustard seed smell appears. Have campers smell/taste the mustard.

**Plant the seed:** Mustard seeds are about the fastest seed to grow. Use a container 4" wide and 2" deep. Fill it half full with potting soil, water the soil until it is damp, sprinkle the seeds thickly on top. Put the pot in a sunny window and in two days, check for little green sprouts which will look like a green lawn.

### **Day Four: Earth Quake**

Moving and shaking things up is an important part of nature and an important part of our Christianity! Christ came to shake things up: he took grains of wheat from the garden to feed his disciples on the Sabbath; he ate with tax collectors and sinners; he overturned tables in the Temple. We are called to "shake up" injustices too, to move out in faith to follow Christ's

example.

**Scripture:**

if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.

—Matthew 17:20-21 NRSV

**Shake It Up**

**Materials:** white note cards, cut in four strips; colored note cards, cut in strips; pencils or markers; solid covered bowl; large glass jar with lid; candy bars

Ask each camper to print their name on two slips of paper: one white, one colored. Have them put one slip into the bowl, and then attach the lid. Show the candy, and explain that there will be a drawing to see who gets the candy.

**Discussion:**

- How did you decide which card to put in the bowl?
- How did you decide when to bring your name to the bowl?
- Based on these choices, what do you believe your chances are of having your name drawn for the candy?

Remove the lid, draw a name from the top, and give out the candy. Replace the lid. Discuss the fairness of the drawing.

- What would improve results?
- What effect would shaking have on each one’s chance?
- What effect would looking into the bowl to select a name have?

Do what has been suggested and draw a second name. Pass out the candy. Next remove the lid from the glass jar. Ask each one to bring their name to this jar. (One name per person is still the rule, but offer white or colored card choices if someone wants to change.) Accept directions from one individual at a time such as:

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Draw one off the top          | Shake the jar first.      |
| Draw a (green) one            | Roll the jar.             |
| Reach clear to the bottom.    | Turn the jar end for end. |
| Don’t look when you reach in. |                           |

**Discussion:**

- Why do some choices such as shaking or not looking seem more just or fair than others? Should everyone eventually get a candy bar?
- Are you more interested before or after you get your candy bar?
- What motivates you to change the process?

**Beans ... Movers & Shakers**

Do you sometimes feel powerless, like your little life can’t make any difference? Your voice is too quiet? No one listens to you? You can’t make a change? Well, beans aren’t too big and strong either, but they can break apart plaster (the stuff walls are made of!) Do this

demonstration for the campers, but prepare two days before this class so that you have a “completed” experiment to show the results.

Cut off the top of a two-liter plastic pop bottle and fill with a mixture of plaster of Paris (two cups) to a little water until the plaster is like thick cream. Plant three or four bean seeds under the surface (but close enough to the edge that you can see them). When the plaster dries, it will be as hard as a rock. Keep the plaster moist by sprinkling it with water each day. In a few days the plaster will break up like a sidewalk in an earthquake! (Show the bean seeds you planted two or three days ago and how they’ve cracked through the plaster.)

### **Scripture Study**

*if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

—Matthew 17:20-21 NRSV

While we consider Jesus a “mover and shaker” today, many of his contemporaries considered him a troublemaker. In many instances, Jesus taught views that were radically different from the rabbis of the day. In some instances he broke Jewish law and custom. Have a discussion using the following scriptures and questions:

Matthew 5:1-18 NRSV	Jesus Heals on the Sabbath
Matthew 10:34-39 NRSV	Not Peace, but a Sword
Matthew 21 :12-13 NRSV	Jesus Cleanses the Temple

### **Discussion**

Was Jesus just a “troublemaker”? Why did he shake things up?

What was he standing for in each of the scripture stories?

How did his “moving and shaking” make a difference?

### **Cross Currents: What in the World**

It is important to make scriptural stories relevant the world of children and youth. Use the following questions to generate the suggested activities:

What’s the difference between being a “troublemaker” and being a “mover and shake”?

What injustices have you witnessed at your school? How can you peacefully shake them up?

Who are others who shook things up against injustice, hate, or intolerance? (Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa, Princess Diana)

What are injustices we need to “shake up” in our world? How can we shake things up and make a difference?

Tell about a time when you or someone you knew “shook things up” to make things better.

### **Suggested Activities**

Using the answers the group generated from the questions above, have campers create one of the following:

a poster reflecting possible solutions to problems in your school

a poem which includes how the work of another person made the world a better place

a video which demonstrates ways to “peacefully” shake things up in the community

a montage of articles and pictures from newspapers and magazines that demonstrates

ways to make a difference in our world

## **Day 5: Harvest Earth**

Most cultures have a celebration of the harvest, the bounty of Gods blessings to them. The joy in the celebration is not only the joy of community, of combining our gifts together, of sharing in the nourishment of the harvest, but it is in the promise that life regenerates itself, and that God will continue to bless us with a bountiful creation. The harvesting of our own gifts as well, for our own joy and for the benefit of others is cause for celebration. How do we share the harvest of God's blessings?

### **Scriptures:**

When the **LORD** restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The **LORD** has done great things for them." The **LORD** has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. Restore our fortunes, O **LORD**, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves. —Psalm 126:1-6 NRSV

### **Seed Time and Harvest**

Materials: roasted seeds such as sunflower, pumpkin, pine nuts, mixed nuts, washed fruit, paper plates, knives or fruit slicers, serving spoons

Serve the foods to be eaten during the discussion.

### **Discussion:**

- Where do each of these foods come from?
- What parts of the parent plant do we eat?
- How is the food prepared?
- How accessible/expensive is it?
- How is it good for our bodies?
- What animals, birds, and insects like these same foods?
- Which of these foods could be used to grow more plants? How?

### **Scripture Study**

The early Hebrews learned about stewardship and appreciation through the celebration at harvest. Divide the campers into groups to prepare the following scriptures as part of a scripture medley. Each group finds and practices their scriptures. Then they come back together and share the message of the scriptures as they relate to God's bountiful blessings.

1. One group looks up the Old Testament scriptures on returning a part of what God gives as an offering.

*The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God.* —Exodus 23:19

*All tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the Lord's; they are holy to the Lord. All tithes of herd and flock, every tenth one that passes under the shepherd's staff, shall be holy to the Lord.* —Leviticus 27:30, 32 NRSV

*The blessing of the Lord makes us rich. . .* —Proverbs 10:22 NRSV

*The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. . .* —Psalm 24:1

*Set apart a tithe of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field.*  
—Deuteronomy 14:22 NRSV

2. The New Testament lessons and those in the Book of Mormon were about sharing and giving and looking out for those who didn't have as much. Read these scriptures from the gospels and from Alma and Mosiah.

*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.* —Matthew 25:40 NIV

*freely ye have received, freely give.* —Matthew 10:7

*They imparted of their substance according to that which they had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the afflicted;* —Alma 1:40 adapted

*I would that you should impart of your substance to the poor, according to that which you have, such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and administering to their relief both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants.* —Mosiah 2:43 adapted

*Share what you have with others.* —Mosiah 1:50 adapted

3. Modern scripture teaches that God is owner and creator of the world in which we live. Ask a group to read these scriptures.

*remember the poor, and dedicate the use of your properties for their support.*  
—Doctrine and Covenants 42:8 adapted

*the earth is full . . . there is enough and to spare. . .* —Doctrine and Covenants 101 :2f

*and all this for the benefit of the church of the living God, that every person may improve upon their talent and gain other talent. . . to be given into the Lord's storehouse, to become the common property of the whole church, everyone seeking the interest of a neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God.*  
—Doctrine and Covenants 81 :4f-g adapted

*a faithful, a just, and a wise steward, shall enter into the joy of the Lord.*  
—Doctrine and Covenants 5: 5b adapted

If you believe there is enough on the earth for everyone, how will your actions show this belief?

What will you cut down on? What will you give up? What will you share?

What do you have more of than you need?

How can you get surplus or abundance to someone who needs it?

**Tale of Three Trees**

Read *The Tale of Three Trees* (Batavia, Illinois: Lion Publishing Corporation, 1989) by Angela Elwell Hunt. This book is about what three trees desired to be, and then what they actually became.

**Discussion:**

If you were a tree, what kind would you be?

When you were “harvested” what would you be?

How do people see God when they see you?

What is the moral of this story?