

# **God, Me and the Environment**

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## Foreword

In recent days environmental issues have gripped the public imagination. Climate change has become a topic of everyday conversation and the role of humans in causing it a matter of bitter contention. Newspapers and television screens are filled with “green” matters and the interest of politicians of all persuasions in the condition of the natural environment has grown immensely. From being the concern of a few fringe groups, the environment has become a central social concern of our community.

The voice of the Christian churches in this important social development of modern times has, at least until very recently, been muted. Despite the rapid growth of ecological theology in academic circles, only a few identifiably Christian voices have been heard in public debate. The fact that Christians believe in a creator God responsible for the natural world has been largely forgotten as other matters occupy the churches’ attention.

Thankfully, this situation is now slowly changing as the churches catch up with this area of public concern. “Christian environmentalism” no longer raises eyebrows to the extent it did in the past and “greenies” are now regarded with less suspicion by even conservative Christians.

However, this change of attitude has not yet been accompanied by the appearance of much educational material viewing the environment and its challenges from a Christian perspective. Most children grow up unconsciously believing that their religious belief has little to do with the environment.

*God, Me and the Environment* seeks to fill this educational gap by proposing a series of six lessons for primary school age children. It encourages children to regard different facets of the environment as parts of God’s creation to be respected and cherished as a divine gift. In doing so, it echoes the claim of Psalm 24 that “the earth and everything that is in it is the Lord’s”.

The lessons have a practical, as well as a theological emphasis. They are designed to be used in situations ranging from the schoolroom and Scripture classes to smaller groups.

### Introductory Notes

- Our main point of reference has been *Through Ecological Eyes – Reflections on Christianity’s Environmental Credentials*, by Robert Barry Leal, St Pauls Publications, 2006.
- These lessons are suggestions. You will need to adapt the ideas to your particular situation, in respect of the space you have available, the resources at hand, and the age of the children you are teaching. You may like to add your own ideas and resources.
- Where appropriate, encourage adults to interact with and respond to any group activities displayed in the church/school.
- To show the children that there are many different ways that we can pray, and recognizing that we all learn in different ways, you will note that we have used a variety of prayer forms.
- The enthusiastic presentation of these lessons is important for the children’s development in understanding the need to care for God’s earth.
- A children’s bible is a useful resource. We recommend the use of *The Lion Bible for Children*, retold by Murray Watts, illustrations by Helen Cann.
- There are many children’s books about the environment. Here are three that we have found useful.
  1. *Wonderful Earth*, by Kim Butterworth and Mick Inkpen, Hunt and Thorpe, 2004.
  2. *The World that We Want*, by Kim Michelle Toft, University of Qld Press, 2006.
  3. *The Lorax*, by Dr Seuss, HarperCollins Children’s Book, 2004.

## Lesson One: Creation

### **Aims:**

- To make children aware that the Christian faith is relevant to their relationship with the environment
- To help children understand the responsibility that this entails to care for God's creation

### **Objectives:**

- To teach children that God created the earth, sky and seas, and everything in them
- To help children understand that God has given us the task of caring for the environment
- To encourage children to respect all aspects of God's creation

### **Outcomes:**

- The children will understand that God's Spirit is in all and through all creation
- The children will become aware of the Genesis creation story
- Through artistic and other creative expression, the children will show their understanding that the environment is God's creation
- The children will give thanks for God's wonderful gifts to us

### **Resources:**

- Bible story from Genesis 1:1 – 2:3
- "Creation – The Story of Life" CD (Doxology Records) Track 1, Creation Overture/Apollo 8 (8 – 12 year olds)
- Art paper, craypas, chalk or paint, PVA glue, ball of wool, Blu tack
- Appropriate posters for display

### **Introduction/Motivation**

#### **4-8 year olds**

Have the children close their eyes, cup their hands and then cover their eyes, keeping their eyes shut so that it is very dark – no light! Explain that it was like that before the world was made! For approximately 30 seconds, play some 'space music' while they have their eyes covered.

#### **8 – 12 year olds**

Have children lie on the floor, preferably with blindfolds over their eyes. Tell them you want them to imagine that they are in outer space, it is totally black, and they can see nothing but blackness. Tell them they will hear some space music, and at the end of the music, Neil Armstrong, a famous astronaut, will speak some special words

### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

*Say to the children that they can open their eyes now, and look into your eyes! Say:*

That is what it was like, before the world as we know it came into being.

The bible tells us it was black, until God created the earth, the sky, the sea and everything in them.

It tells us that God's Spirit was there, moving over his creation and that he was very pleased with what he had made.

The second thing I want to tell you is God needed the people to look after his creation, and to care for it, just as he would want us to.

How good is that!

God has given us his creation, to care for it and be responsible about how we use his wonderful gift!

### Story for 8-12 year olds

*Stop the CD when Neil Armstrong says the words, 'Let there be light'. Have the children remove their blindfolds. Say:*

Well, how did you like that? The words Neil Armstrong spoke were taken from the biblical account of the creation of the earth. These words are found in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. (*Show your bible at this point*) In poetic form, we're told how the world was created. We aren't going to read about that today, but there are two things I want to tell you about that biblical story.

The first important thing we are told is that God's Spirit was in all and through all that he had made. In fact, it tells us that he made people in his likeness. That is an awesome thing! God has placed his Spirit within us, as well as within everything that he has made.

The second important thing in this story is that God has given us a job to do. He has placed us here on earth to care for the earth in just the way he would want us to. Wow! He has given us his creation, to care for it, and to be responsible about how we use his wonderful gift. God must trust us so much! I hope we will not betray that trust.

### Creative Expression

Invite the children to imagine what the world would have looked like when it was first created. Think how beautiful it must have been. Picture in your mind, perhaps, the tall mountains, or the desert places like the centre of Australia. Or maybe you would like to think about the oceans, teeming with fish and wonderful creatures like whales. Then there is the sky, with the amazing shape and colour of the clouds, or you might like to imagine the beautiful birds that fly above us. As well, there are the most beautiful trees and flowers and gardens, and the creatures of the bush, or the farm, or the jungles of the world. There is so much!

Now, I want you to select one of those things, recall what it looks like, and draw it on this paper. We are going to put them all together and make a collage, to represent the world that God created.



### Recall of story

As the children bring their completed works of art to you for display, have them relate what they have represented, e.g. "I've shown that God created the stars and the moon", or "I loved painting the fish that God created."

Paste or Blu tack each picture on to a larger length of fairly strong paper, perhaps overlapping and at an angle to each other. Then with lengths of wool, dipped in PVA glue, paste the wool in curving lines across and around the whole work of art, to represent the Spirit of God moving through creation. As the children watch you place the lengths of wool over and around their work, talk about what you are doing, and why. Commend the children on their wonderful creation!

### Concluding Prayer (individual or class prayer)

- Ask the children to write their own prayers of thanksgiving for the creation of the world around us, and perhaps asking for God's direction and help in caring for his world. (Younger children may need to dictate their prayer to the teacher, who will write it for them.) Prayers could be displayed within the classroom.
- Children might even like to compile their own book of prayers during this series of lessons. This prayer would be the first one.
- The following prayer (or something similar) might be reproduced for the children to take home and illustrate, as an attractive reminder of this lesson.

*Thank you God for your wonderful creation:  
for the sun that warms us by day,  
for the moon that shines at night, and  
for the wind that moves like your Spirit through the world.*

*Help us to take care of:  
all your creatures,  
the trees and the plants,  
the water we drink,  
the air we breathe.*

*Then we shall always be able to enjoy the beautiful world you have created. Amen.*

### **Other creative ideas/follow-up activities**

#### **4 - 8 year olds**

- Draw/paint
- Plant seeds, chart their growth, record the procedure in a class book
- Incorporate various curriculum areas producing class or individual books, depending on the age of the children.
- Creative music using percussion instruments, depicting the story of creation.
- Study the life cycle of an insect, animal or bird.

#### **8 – 12 year olds**

Allow children to choose activities or projects – individual, group or whole class.

- School garden – make a video, or take photos
- Computer research of natural environments
- Propagate plants in school hot house
- Print a few photos of beautiful places taken from around our school, or home, or holidays.
- Study the life cycle of an insect, animal or bird.

## OUR PRAYER

Thank you God for your wonderful creation:

for the sun that warms us by day,

for the moon that shines at night, and

for the wind that moves like your Spirit through the world.

Help us to take care of:

all your creatures,

the trees and plants,

the water we drink,

the air we breathe.

Then we shall always be able to enjoy the beautiful world you  
have created.

Amen.

## **Lesson Two: God Created the Animals – and They Were Very Important Too!**

### **Aims:**

- To raise children's awareness that the Christian faith is relevant to their relationship with the environment
- To reinforce the responsibility that this entails to care for God's creation, including animals
- To encourage awareness in children of the environmental needs of animals

### **Objectives:**

- To reinforce the belief that God created and sustains the earth, sky and seas, and everything in them
- To enhance children's understanding that God has given us the task of caring for the environment, in particular animals
- In the context of the story of Noah, to make children aware of the environmental needs of animals
- To encourage children to accept that people are responsible for maintaining a healthy environment for God's animals

### **Outcomes:**

- The children will understand that God's covenant was made not just with Noah and his descendants, but also with all other living things
- The children will demonstrate their appreciation that animals are a very special part of God's creation
- The children will understand the importance of sharing the environment with animals
- The children will share their knowledge about the environmental needs of animals and acknowledge their responsibility to maintain that environment

### **Resources:**

- Bible references: Genesis 6: 9 – 9:17
- Large sheet of paper for prayer chart (Place/draw/paint a rainbow on the paper. Under the arch, suitable words might be "God's promise was to Noah and all life on earth".)
- Small pieces of paper for individual prayers. (with printed prayer starters for the 4 – 8 year olds).
- Glue, pencils
- CD 'Turn Down the Heat', track 10, 'Let's Build an Ark'(A joint project of the Edmund Rice Centre, Sydney, and the Catholic Education Office, Wollongong.
- [www.zoo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.zoo.nsw.gov.au), or do a google search of zoos around the world.

## Introduction/Motivation

Have the children close their eyes and imagine the world as God created it. Think of its beauty! Think about all the animals and birds, the trees and flowers, the sun, moon and stars. *(pause)* Then think of all the people, their different shapes, sizes and colours. *(pause)* God was very pleased and continued to love his creation – every part of it.

*Move then straight into the story. The children can open their eyes.*

### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

*(Show your Bible)* You know, I have a wonderful story from the bible here, that tells us of God's love for his animals. This story is about what happened thousands and thousands of years ago. Many people lived on the earth at that time. Unfortunately, some of them had become very wicked, and that made God feel so sad. There was one very good man though, and his name was Noah. Noah loved God and he loved the animals too. God told him that he was going to send a big flood of water that would cover the earth where they lived. He told Noah to build a really big boat – called an ark – and to gather two of each of the animals into the ark, so that they would be safe. So Noah did just as God had told him. Some of the wicked people laughed at him, but Noah did not mind – he just kept on working. Then, when the ark was ready, he gathered all the animals, and shut the door behind him, because it had started to rain. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights, and in that time Noah's ark floated on the water. Then the rain stopped at last! God sent a strong wind to blow the water away. Gradually the floodwater disappeared, leaving Noah and his family on dry land. He let the animals go free! Noah was so grateful to God for keeping them safe that he built an altar. God was pleased. He put a rainbow in the sky as a promise to all his creation, and said he would never send a flood like that again - not ever!

### Story for 8 – 12 year olds

There is a wonderful story in the Bible in Genesis, that tells us of a very godly man, called Noah. Now, as we learnt in our last lesson, God was very pleased with his creation and cared about it very much. He put people in charge – to care for the earth and keep it beautiful. However, after many many years, some of the people had grown to be quite wicked, and God was not happy

about that. He told Noah of his plan. He would send a big flood of water to cover the earth, and he wanted Noah to build a huge boat, called an ark, that would keep not only him and his family safe, but would save the animals too. So Noah set to work.

The ark was to be 130 metres long, 22 metres wide and 13 metres high. He made it out of cypress wood and sealed it, inside and out, with tar. He put a door on one side and a window at the top. Some of his neighbours laughed and jeered at him, but Noah took no notice. He just kept on working! At last the day came when he had finished. He gathered up two of every species and led them into the ark. Then he shut the door because it had started to rain.

It rained for a long time – 40 days and 40 nights! The earth was flooded for 150 days. But God had not forgotten Noah, his family, or the animals in the ark. He sent a strong wind to blow the water away. Noah sent a dove to go and find dry land, but the bird could not find any land to rest on, so it came back to the ark. Noah put out his hand and brought the dove back inside. After seven more days, Noah again sent the dove off to find dry land, and this time the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf in its beak. Noah waited another seven days. He sent the dove out a third time, and when it didn't return, Noah knew that the floodwaters were going away.

How glad he was! At last Noah found a dry place and he let all the animals go free.

To thank God for keeping them safe he built an altar. God was very pleased. He put a rainbow in the sky, as a promise to all his creation, and said that he would never send a flood like that again – not ever!

## **Discussion**

What do all these animals need in order to live within their environment, to have enough food and shelter, and remain healthy? *(Clean environment, enough space, trees and plants for food and shelter)*

Why should it be our concern that animals have a good environment in which to live and grow and reproduce? *(Because they are God's creation too, and loved by him. We have the responsibility of sharing the environment - humans and animals together. See Genesis 8:17)*

What are some of the things we could try to do to help keep our environment a great place for people and animals? *(Plant trees, put rubbish in the bins, keep plastic away from water ways, gutters etc., join a land care group, take part in Clean Up Australia Day, talk to adults, parents, teachers about how we can do better)*

## **Creative Expression**

From the story of Noah and the ark, we have learnt that every creature is very important to God. Now it's time for you to choose an animal, and try to be that animal. Show us how it moves, or how it might eat or sleep. What is distinctive about your animal? *Give the children time to plan what they might do. Have some children show which animal they have chosen.*

Following this activity, ask the children to think of a prayer of thanks to God from their animal's point of view. For example, a platypus might say 'Thank you God for giving me a clean little stream in which I can swim and play and find my food.' *Ask some children to share their prayer.*

## Concluding Prayer

### 4 – 8 year olds

Have children say or write their own prayer of thanks to God for their pets, or for an animal with which they have had some contact. Then suggest that they might like to tell God something that they will do to make the earth a better place. Sentence starters would be needed for this age group,

e.g., "Thank you God for.... I will try to..."

Signed.....

Space for a small illustration would be good!



### 8 –12 year olds

Have children write their own prayer of thanks to God for all animals, especially their chosen one. Then suggest that they might like to tell God how they will try to look after his earth.

*(e.g. Thank you God for all the animals you have created, especially for ..... the platypus. I will do my best to... talk to others about our need to keep our world clean, and free from rubbish. Children should be encouraged to sign their commitment and decorate their paper if they wish.)*

Once the prayers have been written, they may be pasted on to the prepared 'rainbow' chart and then displayed prominently.

Commend the children on writing such wonderful prayers and suggest that God would be really pleased with them too.

**For next week** Ask the children to cut out pictures of water, in various forms, and bring them for the next lesson.

## Other creative ideas/follow-up activities

### 4 – 8 year olds

- Visit the Zoo
- Visit a farm
- Make posters to illustrate care for their pets
- Bring your favourite animal picture book from home, to show and share.

### 8 – 12 year olds

- Prepare & give a presentation of the needs of their pets, and how to care for them.
- Organise a visit to a zoo to research the needs and care of animals in captivity.
- Research endangered species and what is being done to assist in their survival.
- Prepare and present a mime of selected animals

### **Lesson Three: Water, Water Everywhere! God's Great Gift!**

#### **Aims:**

- To enhance children's awareness that the Christian faith is relevant to their relationship with the environment
- To stress the responsibility that this entails to care for God's creation, in particular water
- To encourage in children an appreciation of the importance of water

#### **Objectives:**

- To strengthen children's belief that God created and sustains the earth, sky and seas, and everything in them and that God has made us responsible stewards of creation
- To make children aware of the biblical and religious importance of water
- To make children conscious of the fact that water is crucial for our existence
- To foster in children a sense of the importance of respecting and conserving water

#### **Outcomes:**

- The children will be aware of the story of Jesus' baptism and the significance of water in the Bible
- The children will be conscious of the importance of water to all life in God's creation
- The children will appreciate their responsibility to care for water resources, so that all living creatures can survive

#### **Resources:**

- Jesus' baptism, as found in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:2b-22
- Very large sheet of chart paper, three different coloured felt pens, (Artline70 would be good) glue, scissors, pictures of water brought in by the children or prepared by the teacher
- Quiet reflective music for prayer time

#### **Introduction/Motivation:**

#### **Creative Expression - A brainstorming session.**

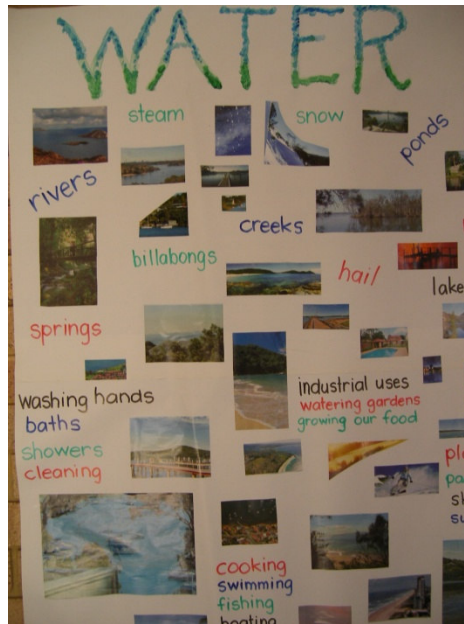
How does the Bible say water came to be on the earth? *Refer back to the creation story. Now write 'WATER' in large letters across the chart paper.*

Where can we find water? (*rivers, creeks, ponds, springs, snow, oceans, steam, billabongs, etc.*) *Get the children to tell you, and, using different coloured felt pens, write the words as they are given to you, in random places on the chart.*

How do we use the water that God gives us? (for washing hands, showers, baths, cleaning, cooking, playing, swimming, surfing, paddling, fishing, boating, industrial uses, watering gardens, growing our food etc. Water is also used in our baptism, symbolising our spiritual cleansing.) Get the children to tell you, and, again using a different coloured felt pen, write their suggestions up on the chart, in random places.

Have many different pictures of water available for each child to select one, and paste it on the chart. You will end up with a melee of words and pictures! Aim to keep this whole activity short.

Commend the children on their good work, and comment on how important water is to us for life. We are fortunate if we have enough water available to us.



#### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

(Tell the children that in this story water will be used and it will have a very important purpose. Say you are hoping that they will be able to tell you about it at the end of the story.)

Jesus had a cousin whose name was John. He lived in the wilderness, and ate the food he found there, like grasshoppers and wild honey. He drank water from the wells in that wilderness. His clothes were made of rough camelhair, and his own hair was quite long. He was a good man, and he wanted to do what God wanted. One day, he heard God speak to him. God told him to tell the people that the Lord's chosen leader was coming, and that they

needed to be prepared. The people were amazed, but they realised that they had done things that were wrong. They needed to show that they were sorry. So John baptised them in the water of the River Jordan. They went into the river and were completely covered by the water, and then they stood up, and walked out again. It was like a sign that all the wrong things they had done before were completely washed away.

When Jesus heard that John was baptising the people, he came to John to be baptised too. "Oh, no!" cried John, "I can't baptise you, I am not good enough to do that. You are far greater than I am!" (John knew that Jesus was God's son.) But Jesus said that it was God's will, and

so John also baptised him in the water of the River Jordan. An amazing thing happened after that. As Jesus was coming out of the water, the skies seemed to open and the Spirit of God

came down in the form of a dove. A voice was heard to say, "This is my Son, whom I love. I am very pleased with him."

### Story for 8 - 12 year olds

(Tell the children that in this story water will be used and it will have a very important purpose. Say that you are hoping that they will be able to tell you about it at the end of the story. You may also like to explain that the people of Israel, the Jews, were God's chosen people. This whole story of Jesus and John the Baptist was actually foretold in the Old Testament, in the book of the prophet Isaiah. The 'washing' of Baptism symbolised a radical cleaning up of a person's life – wiping the slate clean of all previous wrong – a return to God. John's baptism, unlike the customary ritual washings, was once- only. Jesus had no need to be baptised in order to be forgiven, because "he had no sin". )

Jesus had a cousin whose name was John. I imagine that Jesus and John knew each other very well, because John's mother, Elizabeth, was Mary's cousin. John's father, Zechariah, was a Jewish priest. When he was old enough, John went out to live in the wilderness, and waited for God to speak to him. He ate whatever he could find - locusts and wild honey, and drank water from wells. His hair grew long, and he wore rough camelhair clothes. One day, he heard God speak to him. God said, "Call the people of Israel and tell them to get ready for the coming of the Lord." So he did. He began preaching just where he was. People came to him because they were curious. Soon, many took John's words seriously

when he told them to repent, to turn away from the wrong things they had been doing. They asked John to baptise them in the water of the River Jordan. They had to walk into the river until they were completely covered by the water, and then they stood up, and walked out again. It was a sign that all the wrong things that they had done before were completely washed away. They were sorry for these things and they wanted to try to live better lives from that time on. They asked John to tell them who he was. John explained that he wasn't anyone really important. He was simply chosen by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. He said, "I am not the Saviour that you are looking for – he will follow me and will be much more powerful than I am. I baptise you with water. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. I am not worthy even to touch his sandals."

Now, when Jesus heard that John was baptising people, he too went to see him, and he asked John to baptise him as well. "No", said John, "it isn't right. I should be the one who is baptised by you! You are far greater than I am!"

Jesus answered, "It is God's will that I should be baptised."

So John baptised Jesus in the water of the River Jordan. As Jesus was coming out of the water, the skies seemed to open and the Spirit of God came down in the form of a dove. A voice was heard that said, "This is my beloved Son. I am very pleased with him."

## Discussion

Ask the children to tell you what they heard about water in the story. (*River Jordan, water used to baptise people, water symbolising the washing away of all the wrong things that people have done*) Say that water was just as important then, in the days of Jesus, as it is today. They needed water in the same way as we do. (*It is interesting to note that the human body is made up of 70% water.*) Ask the children to tell you why water, this amazing gift from God, is so important to us? (*Living things would die without it!*) Remember that God has put us in charge of caring for all living creatures in his world. How then are we going to make sure that we have enough water for everyone's needs? (*Be careful not to waste water, only use what we need, plant gardens that don't need a lot of water, have short showers, no dripping taps etc*) How can we be sure that the water will be good and clean for use? Have you seen how dirty our rivers, waterways and beaches can be? What can we do about it? (*Make sure our rubbish is put into the rubbish bins; tell our politicians that we want laws to encourage business, industries and people to use less water and to keep the water clean; join a 'stream watch' group that monitors how clean the water is, practise organic farming etc.*)

Now take time for the children to simply have a break by going to get a drink of water, letting them feel the water running through their fingers.

## Prayer Time

Prepare a small worship table, like a coffee table, with perhaps a cross, a vase of flowers, and a glass of water. Ask the children to sit on the floor, in a circle around the table. The children will be invited to meet God in their imaginations, and to talk to him. Have quiet reflective style music playing in the background.

Say: Shut your eyes and imagine that you are on your own – no one else is here. The only voice will be my mine, suggesting things that you might like to talk to God about. You might find it easier to imagine that you are talking to your friend Jesus. Just sit with him now.

Tell God, or Jesus, about all the things you like to do with water. (pause) Tell him how important it is for you, and all living things. (pause) Say thankyou to God for his amazing gift. (pause) Tell God that sometimes our rivers, waterways and beaches are not as clean as they should be. Tell him what you have seen. (pause) Remember that God created the water for us to use. How does God feel when you tell him about the dirty/smelly water? (pause) What do you think God might ask you to do about it? (pause) Tell God what you intend to do to help care for his great gift of water. Ask him to help you. (pause)

When appropriate, the quiet music can be gradually turned down, and the children can open their eyes. Or you may prefer to close with a collective type of prayer, giving thanks that God has heard the prayers of his children.

## Other creative ideas/follow-up activities

### 4 – 8 year olds

- Water play
- Water plants in garden
- Go swimming
- Blow bubbles with soapy water
- List uses of water in the school/church
- Count the number of taps
- Study the water cycle
- List ways to save water at home

### 8 – 12 year olds

- Water experiments
- Look up 'Water Board' web site
- Organize a visit by a plumber
- Join a 'stream watch' group
- Observe a storm water channel
- Find the water meter and record water usage
- Graph water usage
- Contact local council/shire regarding storm water control
- List ways to save water at home

## Lesson Four: A Bush Fire! In the Bible?

### **Aims:**

- To heighten children's awareness that the Christian faith is relevant to our relationship with the environment
- To underline the responsibility that this entails to care for God's creation
- To understand the significance in creation of God's gift of fire

### **Objectives:**

- To stress the fact that God created and sustains the earth, sky and seas, and everything in them and that God has made us responsible stewards of creation
- To make children aware of the biblical and religious importance of fire
- To make children conscious of the fact that fire is crucial for our existence
- To encourage in children a sense of respect for fire

### **Outcomes:**

- The children will be aware of the story of Moses and the burning bush.
- The children will be conscious of the importance of fire in God's creation
- The children will begin to understand the significance of fire in the Bible and in Christian worship
- The children will understand that we need to be responsible in our use of fire

### **Resources:**

- The story of Moses, Exodus: 2-4
- Orange, red and yellow papers, of different textures (cellophane, tissue, wall paper) and magazine pictures using autumn/fiery colours
- A prepared drawing of Moses (a copy is included at the end of the lesson)
- Scissors, glue, and a large sheet of thickened paper for the display

### **Introduction/Motivation**

Ask the children where they may have felt the presence of God. *Be ready to suggest an example or two of where they may have had that experience e.g. a peaceful beach, the bush, sunset, starry skies, cathedrals, rugged mountains etc. Encourage them to think of times when they have stopped still and listened to the silence, and thought, 'Wow, this is beautiful!' or something similar! Sometimes, as adults, we forget that children can be aware of the presence of God!*

Then say, "Today, we have the story of Moses, who experienced God's presence in a most extraordinary way! (Before the story discuss with the children the meanings of possible new words or concepts e.g. 'Israelite' 'ancestors' 'Pharaoh') Are you ready for the story?"

### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

Do you remember Moses? When he was a baby, his mother, who was an Israelite, hid him in a basket, and floated it in the river, to try and save her baby's life! And do you remember that a princess found him, and he was brought up in the Pharaoh's palace, even though he was an Israelite. When Moses grew to be a man, he was very upset about the way the Israelite people were being treated as slaves, and he tried very hard to stop the bad things that were happening. It got so bad, that Moses had to leave his home in Egypt. He went to a far-off country, and became a farmer. He married, had a family, and he was very happy there. He knew that God was good to him.

One day, when Moses was looking after some sheep, he noticed a strange thing. He saw a bush that seemed to be on fire, but as he watched, he noticed the bush was not actually burning! He went a bit closer, and then he heard a voice cry out his name, "Moses! Moses!" He looked around and could not see anyone. He heard the voice say, "Take off your shoes because you are standing on holy ground." Moses was frightened, and did as he was told. Then the voice said, "I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have seen how badly my people are being treated in Egypt. I want you to go to Pharaoh, and tell him to let my people go." Moses didn't want to do it! He was frightened! He thought he wasn't good enough! He made all sorts of excuses why he couldn't go. But God said that he would be with him, and eventually Moses agreed to go.

### Story for 8 – 12 year olds

You might remember the story of Moses. As a baby, his mother hid him in a basket, and he was found by a princess of Egypt, who brought him up in the palace of the Pharaoh. When Moses grew to be a man, he was terribly troubled about the way the Israelite people were treated as slaves. The Pharaoh made them work very, very hard, and the slave drivers were mercilessly cruel to them. They would stand over them and whip them and beat them to make them work harder. Moses got so angry about it one day when he saw a slave driver brutally treating someone, he could not stop himself. He started fighting the slave driver! In the end he actually killed him. Moses was so sorry that the fight had ended in that way. He knew he could not stay in Egypt. So he set off to the land of Midian. It was there that he joined the family of Jethro. He married, had children, and was very happy there.

One day he climbed Mount Sinai. He was minding Jethro's sheep, and was searching for one that had strayed away. As he was searching, he noticed a bush that seemed to be on fire, and yet, as he looked he saw that the fire was not actually burning the bush! The leaves and branches were still there! As he took a step closer to have a better look he heard a voice calling his name, "Moses! Moses!" He looked around but could not see anyone, so he said, "Here I am," and then the voice said, "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." Trembling, Moses obeyed. Then he heard the voice again, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. I have seen the cruel way my people are being treated in Egypt. I want you to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let my people go! I have chosen you to lead them and bring them out of their slavery into a new land flowing with milk and honey." Moses hid his face. He did not know what to say. Why had God come to him? He was so ashamed of what he had done in Egypt; he couldn't believe that God would want him. He made all sorts of excuses, but God assured him that he would be with him and would give him the words to say. God even agreed that Moses' brother, Aaron, could go with him to support him. Eventually, Moses said that he would go to Pharaoh because God had called him.

## Creative Expression

Distribute the coloured papers and ask the children to trace around an outstretched hand.

Cut out and paste it on to the large sheet of paper, making the shape of a bush on fire, the fingers representing the tongues of fire. The figure of Moses could be placed standing before the fire, and God's words to Moses could be written underneath, "You are standing on holy ground".



## Discussion

That was an amazing story of God being present in the fire. There are other stories in the Bible where God reveals himself through fire. Today, in our churches, fire is used as a visual reminder of the presence of God. What 'fire' objects have you noticed in some of the churches that you have visited? (*Christ/Paschal candle, sanctuary lamp, Uniting church logo, Presbyterian emblem, church banners. You may need to explain briefly what these objects are, or represent*)

We have seen that fire is important in the Bible, and in our churches. Is fire still important for us today, such as in our bush lands? (*Yes, seed dispersal and bush regeneration depend on it.*) How do we use God's gift of fire in the way we live? (*heating, cooking, power and light, transport*) In the past, people have been wasteful in the way they have used God's gift of fire. The world is running out of fuel to keep the fires burning. *You may need to explain how coal, which is dug out of the ground, and burnt in the Power Stations, produces electricity. Similarly, petrol for our cars is made from oil, and that spark plugs ignite the petrol that produces the power to move the car.*

How can we be more responsible in our homes, so that we do not use too much energy?

*(Turn off lights when not in use, close doors and windows when it is cold or very hot, put on an extra jumper, not over-use the air-conditioning, walk wherever possible rather than using the car, etc.)*

## **Prayer time**

Our prayers today will be in three parts. Firstly, we will thank God for fire, and then we will acknowledge that we cannot live without his gift. Finally we will ask God to help us to be more responsible in our use of fire.

*Let us pray.*

*God, you are the creator of all good things. We thank you for your gift of fire, for the many ways in which we use fire today for our own advantage: for cooking our food, for heating our homes, for giving light and comfort, and sometimes as an aid to our worship.*

*God, we realise that we could not live without your wonderful gift. We often take it for granted, and have at times misused fire. Forgive us for these times.*

*God, help us to be more responsible in our use of fire. Help us not to waste this valuable resource.*

*Amen.*

## **Other creative ideas/follow-up activities**

### **4 – 8 year olds**

- Visit a church to see where fire, or symbols of fire are used.
- Organise a visit to the Fire Station
- Know your school and family fire evacuation plans in case of fire
- Learn safety slogans e.g. 'Drop down low and go, go, go' 'Stop, drop and roll'

- Make posters to remind others.

### **8 – 12 year olds**

- Do internet research on bush fires , and record findings
- Make posters on fire safety.
- Learn safety slogans
- Sketch bush with black crayon, and apply orange paint wash.



## **Lesson Five: Air – The Breath of God!**

### **Aims:**

- To recapitulate that the Christian faith is relevant to our relationship with the environment
- To stress the responsibility that this entails to care for God's creation, in particular air
- To help children understand the significance of air in God's creation

### **Objectives:**

- To make children aware of the biblical and religious importance of air
- To make children conscious of the fact that clean air is vital to our existence
- To encourage in children a sense of respect for air

### **Outcomes:**

- The children will understand that God is the source of all life
- The children will be conscious of the importance of air in God's creation
- The children will begin to understand the significance of air and wind in the Bible and in Christian worship
- the children will understand their role in reducing air pollution

### **Resources:**

- The Bible – *NRSV* and *CEV* Genesis 1 and 2
- Pictures of polluted industrial air, and also of the green countryside
- Black Line Master of Windmill pattern, dressmaking pins, plastic straws, Blu Tack or cork, scissors (a copy is included at the end of this lesson)
- A tree/shrub/plant to put in the church/grounds school, if possible
- Note that the Hebrew word for 'spirit' and 'wind' is the same.

### **Introduction/Motivation**

Ask the children to find a space without touching one another. They should sit quietly and comfortably, and close their eyes. When calm, instruct them to take deep breaths, slowly in through their nose, and out through their mouth. Repeat the process a few times. Now, tell them to hold their hand in front of their mouth as they breathe out. What is it that you just felt? (*The air*) Where does the air come from that you breathed in? (*It is all around us*) How do we know that we have to breathe? (*It is automatic, and happens without our thinking about it.*)

### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

In the bible we read that God created the earth and everything in it. He formed human beings, and breathed his spirit, the spirit of life, into them. They were living people! Right from the very beginning, we learn that God's spirit breathed over all his creation, and gave it life!

### Story for 8 – 12 year olds

Let me read to you from Genesis 2: 7. This is part of the creation story. "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being." So we discover that it was God who breathed his spirit into Adam and gave him life. God has given us life too.

In the first chapter of Genesis, verses 1 and 2, we read, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth 'was barren, with no form of life' (CEV) and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

So, right from the very beginning, we learn that God's spirit breathed over all his creation, and gave it life!

### Discussion

Does anyone know what we are actually breathing? (*Air. Part of that AIR is oxygen which we cannot live without.*) Where does oxygen come from? (*The trees.*) How does it get there? (*The trees and plants breathe out oxygen that we breathe in, and we breathe out carbon dioxide that the trees and plants breathe in.*) This is called the oxygen cycle, and illustrates how important the trees are to us, and to all living things. The forests and trees have sometimes been called 'the lungs of the world.' So it is easy to see why we need to look after our trees – we depend on them for life!

Sometimes people forget how important our trees are. We need them to keep the air clean. I'm going to show you some pictures, and I want you to decide whether the air in this first picture is as clean as it should be. *Show the picture of polluted air.*

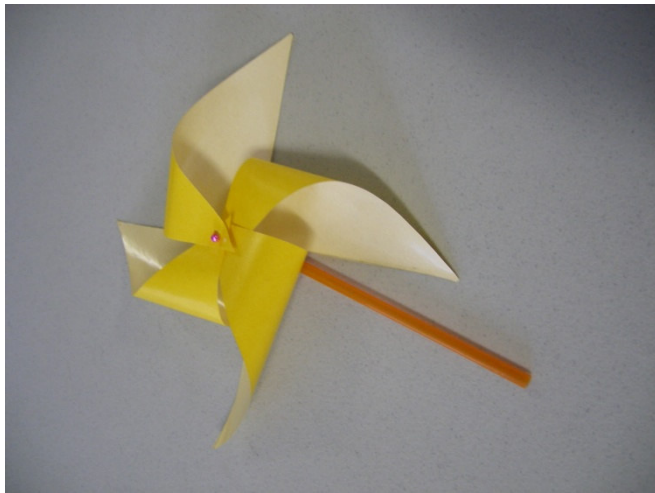
What is the difference between the air we are breathing, and the air in this picture? (*The air in the picture is dirty or smoky or polluted.*) *Now show a picture of the countryside, where everything is green and beautiful.* Which air would you rather breathe? (*The air in picture 2*)

What then can we do to help keep our air clean? (*We could plant more trees, and give the trees as much water as we can to help them grow strong. Tell governments that clean air is very important to us, by writing letters to the Prime Minister and State Premier, and/or by inviting your local member to discuss the environmental work done by the group.*)

## Creative Expression

Make a windmill by using the diagram provided, on which the instructions are written.

Once completed, blow on to the windmill to remind ourselves that the air we breathe in and out is God's gift of life to each one of us.



## Prayer time

Today as we pray together, I will say the first part of the sentence, and after a pause, I will say "God" and we all will say "we thank you."

*Let us pray now.*

*For breathing life into your creation ..... God, **we thank you.***

*For fresh air to breathe ..... God, **we thank you.***

*For all the trees that keep our air clean ..... God, **we thank you.***

*For people in industry who are finding ways to keep our air clean ...God, **we thank you.***

*For helping us to do our part whenever we can ..... God, **we thank you.***

**Amen.**

## **Plant something green**

Having previously selected a suitable tree/shrub/seedling for the church/school grounds, go outside and have a 'tree' planting ceremony. Make sure the garden has been properly prepared, and a garden fork and water are available. (*Perhaps your local council might like to donate a tree or plant.*)

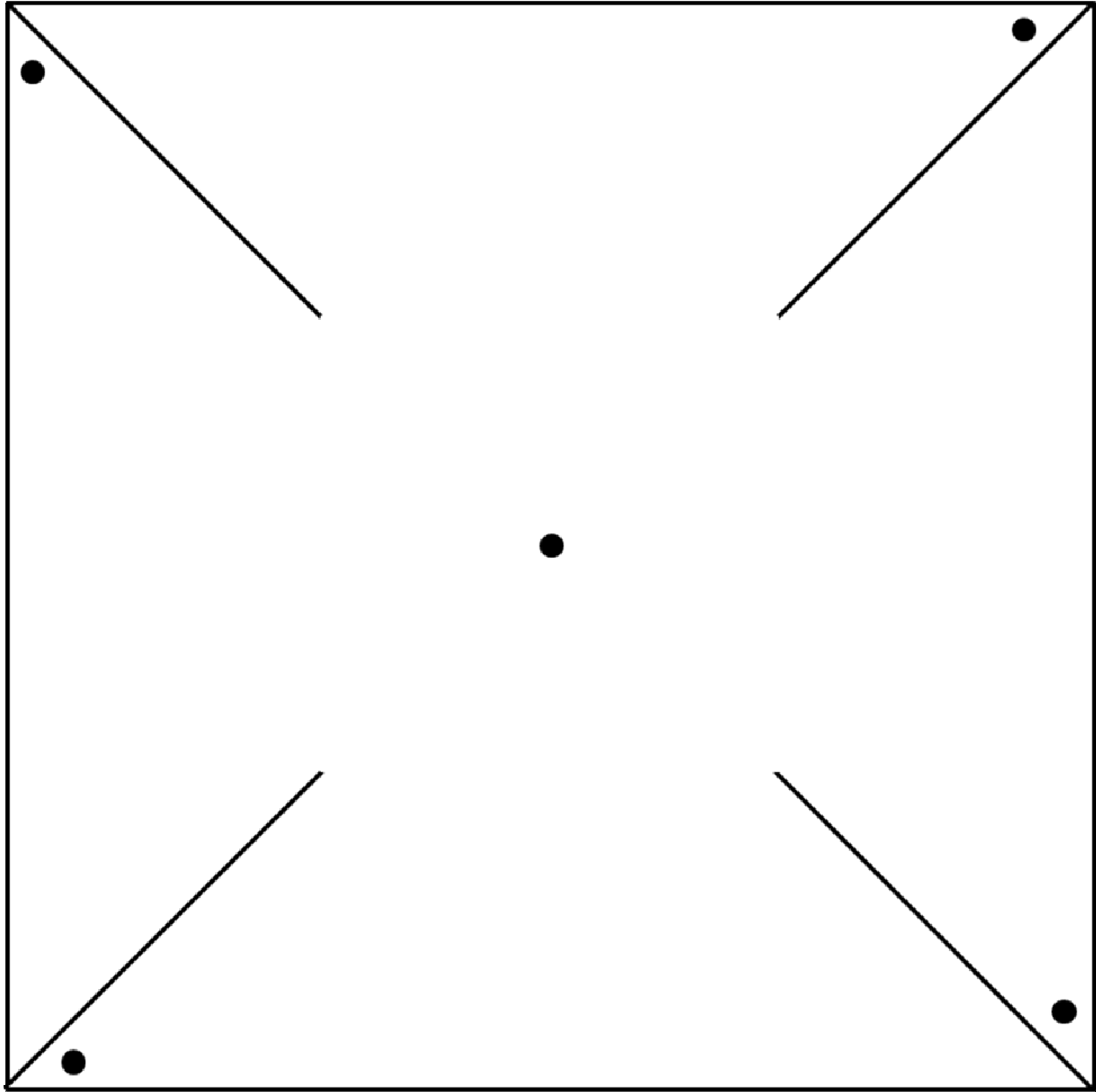
## **Other creative ideas/follow-up activities**

### **4 – 8 year olds**

- Care for school/church garden
- Keep on planting more trees
- Take responsibility for switching off lights and electrical equipment, when not in use
- Where possible, walk to school/church
- Appreciate the fresh air in the bush, the mountains or seaside
- Observe the band of smog in the city
- Note how strong winds and rain clear the air

### **8 – 12 year olds**

- Write letters to the government about environmental concerns
- Organise a visit from the local council to discuss local environmental work done by the class
- Ask the children to suggest ways of keeping our air clean
- Care for school/church garden
- Plant more trees
- Where possible, walk to school/church
- Switch off all electrical equipment when not in use
- Experience the fresh air found in the bush, mountains and seaside
- Observe band of smog in the city
- Note how strong winds and rain clear the air



**You will need:**

Pins with large heads  
A small bead  
Stiff coloured paper  
Pencils with rubbers on the end, or a  
plastic straw with a small piece of Blu Tack

**Instructions:**

Cut along the black lines  
Fold each corner with a dot into the centre,  
pushing the pin through the dot as you pick  
up each one.  
Push the pin through the centre dot.  
Slip the bead onto the pin.  
Push the pin into the rubber end of the  
pencil.  
Blow your windmill and watch it spin!

## **Lesson Six: Nurturing Earth – God’s Gift to Us!**

### **Aims:**

- To stress that Christian faith is relevant to our relationship with the environment
- To emphasise the responsibility that this entails to care for God’s creation, in particular God’s earth
- To help children understand the significance of earth in God’s creation

### **Objectives:**

- To make children aware of the biblical and religious importance of earth
- To make children conscious of the fact that good unpolluted earth is vital to our existence
- To encourage in children a sense of respect for earth

### **Outcomes:**

- The children will understand that God is the source of all life
- The children will be conscious of the importance of earth in God’s creation
- The children will begin to understand the significance of earth in the Bible and in Christian worship
- The children will become aware of what they can do to care for earth

### **Resources:**

- The Bible story “The Parable of the Sower” - Matthew 13:1-8.
- CD ‘One People, One Land’ by Monica Brown. Emmaus Productions, PO Box 54 Thornleigh 2120 Phone 02 9484 0252 Track 9 – “If We Care”
- Chart/PowerPoint/Overhead copy of words of the song
- Paper for each child, with the prayer printed in the middle
- Coloured pencils, felt pens, paint, brushes or sticks
- Mustard seeds, as a visual aid, if desired.

### **Introduction/Motivation**

As the children come in and settle, have the CD playing Track 9 “If We Care”. We want to begin with a sense of joyful music with words relating to the care of the earth. When the children are ready, turn the sound down. They will learn it later in the lesson.

### Story for 4 – 8 year olds

Jesus once told a story about a farmer who went out to his field to sow some seeds. He threw them everywhere, wanting as many as possible to grow. Unfortunately, some of those seeds fell on the roadway, and the birds ate them. Other seeds fell in rocky stony gravel and although they grew quickly, they couldn't put down roots. They gradually withered and died. Still other seeds fell among weeds, and as they came up the weeds strangled them. There wasn't enough room for them to grow and so they came to nothing. However, most of the seeds fell on to the good earth and they grew well and produced a great harvest for the farmer.

### Story for 8 – 12 year olds

One day, the people were again gathered around Jesus, and he began teaching them by telling them a story. He pointed to a farmer in a nearby field. They noticed that the farmer had a bag over his shoulder, and from it he was taking seed and scattering it over his fields, as he walked slowly up and down. So Jesus told them about a farmer just like that one, who went out scattering his seeds all over his field. Some of the seeds fell on the roadway next to the field, and those seeds were trampled on or were quickly eaten by the birds. Other seeds fell on rocky ground. They sprouted quickly, but there was no soil so they couldn't put down roots. They withered and died. Then there were some other seeds that fell amongst the weeds and thorny bushes. As they grew the weeds strangled the life out of them. However, most of the seeds fell on to the good deep soil. They grew up strong and healthy and produced a wonderful harvest for the farmer.

### Discussion and recall of previous lessons

It's good to know that Jesus knew all about the need for good soil. He would have remembered also, the story of Creation we learnt about in our first lesson, where God tells the people to cultivate the earth and look after it. These days, many farmers are learning how to look after the earth even better than they used to. Many have stopped using fertilisers and chemicals, because they have discovered that it isn't good for the earth. The over-use of fertilisers encourage exotic weeds to grow, and green algae grows on our dams and rivers. We don't want that, do we? No!

Well then, what can we do in our own gardens about this? (*Make our own compost heap, get a worm farm, use mulch to keep the soil damp*)

Now, let's think back on what we have been learning. Look around our room and remind ourselves of all our lessons. How then, can **we** look after God's earth?

**Song:** The song we heard at the beginning of the lesson is a really good song that will remind everyone of all the things people can do to help look after God's earth. *Direct the children's attention to the word chart. Have the words displayed, and play track 9, pointing to the words, so that the children will follow along. Play it through a second time, and suggest they might like to join in quietly where they think they can. Finally, stand and try to sing it out strongly.*

**Prayer time:** The native or indigenous people of all lands, including our own Australian Aboriginals, tell various stories about Mother Earth. An Aboriginal writer named Walter Fejo says "We look after the land as we look after a mother. And the land looks after us like a mother". (In R B Leal, *The Environment*

*and Christian Faith*, p.98) You see, just as our parents take care of us, God's earth can provide for all our needs too. That's wonderful, isn't it?

We've already talked about the things we can do to help God look after his earth. Are you willing to help God? *As the children indicate their willingness to try, go on to say the following words.*

Well, I think it would be a good idea to tell him just that!

If you would like to, we could do something very special. Stand up and form a circle. Stretch out your hands in front of you, and let your end fingers touch the person's fingers on each side of yours. Now I will say a short prayer while we are standing like this. *If any child is reluctant, accept that, and suggest they could watch. But stipulate that they mustn't make a sound, as people will be praying.*

When the children are ready, say this prayer. "Dear God, help us to use our hands to look after this wonderful world of yours. Amen."

Commend the children on their willingness to be God's helpers, and then ask them to sit again in front of you.

### **Creative Expression**

Give each child a prepared sheet of paper, with the prayer printed on it. Show them how to trace their hands (*the ones they will use to help God look after his world!*). The children could then decorate them as they wish – perhaps using aboriginal 'dot or stroke' paintings. They will be able to take their work home as a reminder that they will be God's helper in looking after his world.



## **If We Care**

Ba dum ba dum, ba de da de da de da

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da

If we care for our selves, then we'll really care for the earth.

If we care for each other, then we'll really care for the earth.

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da de da

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da

If we care for the earth, then we'll plant a tiny tree and watch it grow.

If we care for the trees, then the trees will help our atmosphere.

If we care for ourselves and for each other,

Then we'll care for the earth, care for the earth.

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da de da

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da

If we care for the earth, then we'll watch what flows into our waterways.

If we keep our water clean, then we're sure to be much healthier.

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da de da

Ba dum ba dum, da de da de da

If we care for the earth, and recycle everything we possibly can,

Then the air that we breathe, has a better chance to be fresh and clean.

If we care for ourselves and for each other,

Then we'll care for the earth, care for the earth.

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## **An after-thought!**

You might like to finish this series with a great story about the environment. We loved reading *'The World that We Want'* by Kim Michelle Toft, University of Qld Press.

## **Other creative ideas/follow-up activities**

### **4 – 8 year olds**

- Plant a seed in soil, sand and gravel. Water them all and discover which one grows best.
- Plant more trees and shrubs.
- Start a worm farm.
- Build a compost bin for lawn clippings, leaves, green waste.
- Sing "If We Care" for a school assembly or church

### **8 – 12 year olds**

- Carry out experiments with growing seeds in various conditions. Record findings.
- Research the value of worms.
- Take responsibility for school/church garden.
- Sing "If We Care" for a school assembly or church
- Set up a 'hot-house' to propagate new plants, grow seedlings