

The Questions We Ask

A First Day School Lesson

for older children and young teens

by Karen Greenler

based on the story "Creation" from [The Complete Guide to Godly Play](#)
Volume 2, by Jerome W. Berryman, pages 41-48 (2002)

Materials needed:

The picture cards (examples follow) from the Godly Play story, "Creation"

- Light and dark
- The firmament with waters above and below
- The water and land card
- The day and night card
- The creatures that fly and swim card
- The creatures that walk on legs card
- The card of rest

Index cards (as follows) with the Biblical creation story.

Index cards (as follows) with the Big Bang story.

A strip of dark felt the length of the cards, to ground the story.

1. Ask the class to imagine, "You are part of a tribe, living on a mountain top or on an island. Imagine that you have no knowledge of any religious or mythical creation story, nor of science, nor any other source of information other than your people's shared experience. You are responsible for explaining the existence of the world around you. What questions do you need to answer for your people? What do they find confusing or awe-inspiring in the natural world? What frightens them? What needs an explanation?" (At this point, you are not concerned with the answers, only with the questions.)

2. Brainstorm on questions. Write down the questions on easel paper or a blackboard. If they are not sure where to start, you can ask questions like, "In your imagination, look around your mountain top or island. What do you see around you?" "What time of day or night is it?" "What are your people like?" Try to elicit questions that ask about things like the nature of:

The cosmos (day/night/sun/planets/moon/stars)

The earth (trees/animals/other plants/mountains/water)

The people (men/women/babies/language/art)

You should record the questions. You may choose to group them or ask the students to help group like items, but this is not necessary.

3. Tell the students that you have two stories that are, on their surface, very different. But remember that "all good stories are true, and some of them even happened." (I have used Marcus Borg's distinction between factual and true. We may not believe that Aesop's story of the tortoise and the hare is a factual story. But is it true? Is there truth in the story? Other stories, like that of Rosa Parks getting arrested for not giving up her seat for a white woman, are both factual and true.)

4. Hand students the index cards with the text of the Biblical creation story, one card at a time. As the first student reads the first card, unroll the felt underlay. Going forward, as each student reads a card, you lay down the corresponding picture on the felt. Have the student put the story card under the picture that it represents.

5. When all seven days are complete, ask the students, “I wonder how this story answers the questions we wrote down earlier?” Compare it to the questions they asked. Some may object that the Biblical creation story is mythology or not scientific. That’s ok; ask again how the story might answer the questions if you had no other source of information. There may be questions the story doesn’t answer, like where language comes from. You can tell them that the Biblical creation story has more to it and answers some of the other questions in later chapters, or you can just acknowledge that the observation is true. You can stay with your students’ wondering observations, or you can facilitate a discussion based on their observations, depending on your students’ inclination and how much time you have.

6. Tell them it’s time for the other creation story. Hand the students the cards of the Big Bang story, one at a time. Each student can read a card and then decide to put it above the picture that it best describes. You may want to note that these cards won’t follow the pictures in a strictly linear order, which is ok; they correspond only in a general way. There might be some discussion about what the best place is for a particular Big Bang card. Acknowledge that there can be more than one place to put the card, allowing the student who read the card to choose.

7. Ask the students again, “I wonder how this story answers the questions we wrote down earlier?”

8. Additional questions you might ask: “I wonder what you found interesting in these stories?” “I wonder what questions these stories raise for you?”

9. If it doesn’t come up organically in the conversation, you can help them understand that both stories needn’t be equally factual to have something true to tell us. They are remarkably similar because they are attempts to answer the same human questions. Different stories have different strengths and weaknesses at different times in human history.

10. “I wonder if, in the future, the Big Bang story will seem as antiquated as the Biblical story now does?”

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were above from the waters which were below; and it was so. And God called the firmament "Heaven." So the evening and the morning were the second day.

Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so. And God called the dry land "Earth", and the gathering together of the waters He called "Seas." And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit, according to its kind," and it was so. And God saw that it was good.

So the evening and the morning were the third day.

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them give light on the earth"; and it was so. God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the heavens to give light on the earth. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the heavens." So God created great sea creatures according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

Then God said, "Let the land bring forth living creatures according to its kind: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the land, each according to its kind"; and it was so. And God made the beasts of the land and everything that creeps on the land according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." So God created man in His own image; He created them, male and female. And God blessed them. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day.

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

The Big Bang was not an explosion in space; it was the appearance of space everywhere in the universe. The universe was born as a very hot, very dense, single point in space.

When the universe was very young — something like a hundredth of a billionth of a trillionth of a trillionth of a second, it doubled in size at least 90 times. As it expanded, it got cooler and less dense and matter formed.

Light chemical elements were created within the first three minutes of the universe's formation. However, the intense heat from the universe's creation made it too hot for light to shine. Atoms crashed together and broke apart creating a fog that scattered the light.

About 400 million years after the Big Bang, clumps of gas collapsed enough to form the first stars and galaxies. The process, plus the clearing of foggy hydrogen gas, caused the universe to become transparent to ultraviolet light for the first time.

Many scientists think the sun and our solar system were formed 4.6 billion years ago from a giant, rotating cloud of gas and dust. As gravity caused the cloud to collapse, it spun faster and flattened into a disk and most of the material was pulled toward the center to form the sun.

Larger fragments of dust and debris clumped together to form planets. Earth formed in this manner about 4.5 billion years ago. During the first 800 million years of its history, the surface of the Earth changed from liquid to solid.

On the early earth, the atmosphere was likely methane, ammonia, and other toxic gases. As the Earth's crust cooled, rocks and continental plates began to form and life first appeared on Earth. Our oldest fossils date to roughly 3.5 billion years ago, and consist of bacteria.

About 550 million years ago, multi-celled animals underwent a dramatic "explosion" in diversity, and almost all living animal groupings appeared within a few millions of years. Animals, fungi, and plants colonized the land, and the insects took to the air.

Humans have existed for only a fraction of Earth's history. Earth itself is approximately 4.5 billion years old and the oldest known humanlike fossil is about 4.4 million years old. The species to which we belong, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, is only about 40,000 years old.

<http://www.space.com/13320-big-bang-universe-10-steps-explainer.html>

<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/help/timeform.php>

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0932663.h>



Possible Creation story picture cards. Art by Ellie Bradley and Melinda Wenner Bradley