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## ARTICLE #11: MAKING LESSONS INTERESTING AND MEMORABLE

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*I have loved learning about other countries and people all my life.*

I still can remember my second grade teacher, Mrs. Hamada, telling stories to my class about what it was like to grow up in Hawaii . But, the parts that I remember best were the films of volcanoes exploding – with hot, red molten lava flowing down the mountainside in slow-motion, overtaking anything in its way, until finally.... the red river of heat and flame tumbled into the ocean, spewing billowy clouds of steam up into the air. Another vivid memory from that second grade class was when Mrs. Hamada’s family sent us fresh Hawaiian pineapples and fragrant leis (pronounced lays) made from real orchids! We’d never thought about where pineapples came from or how delicate and beautiful the flower necklaces were. In short – it was through personal stories and visible – and tangible – articles that the exotic island of Hawaii became real to us.

So – when I began teaching Oasis missions lessons as part of our home group’s Adopt-a-Class, I wanted to bring that element of 3-D vividness to the classroom. The Oasis curriculum is well designed and provides all the key elements -- so, when I prepare for teaching the lesson, all I “add” – if that is the right word – is:

- An understanding of the individual kids in our classroom and
- Ideas about how to accentuate the visual and tangible aspects of the lesson.

As I prepare for a class, I read through the entire lesson plan (craft, verse, teaching, small group & game), I ask myself, “what are the key 2-3 points that are the core of the lesson – the info that is important for the kids to remember and to take home?” Then I look at how the elements reinforce those key points.

### **CRAFTS:**

For our class, we have craft time for the first 10 minutes, then go to music, so crafts offer us a great opportunity to:

- Greet the kids and engage them in 1 on 1 conversation – finding out about the high and low points of their week. I encourage the teaching assistants (adult and students) to sit at the tables with the kids. Note: If the teaching team comes early, there is time to pray and set up the room before the first kids arrive – so that the focus is then on the kids (& their parents). This time really helps the kids settle down, e.g. if a child is unusually quiet, tired or upset, we have an opportunity to find out why. By addressing it early, the child may engage more in the rest of the class time.
- The craft is a good way to introduce the lesson topic. Note: I strongly feel that the craft is not just busy work. To make it most effective – I prepare a sample for each table before the kids start arriving. I don’t know about all age groups, but for 2nd and 3rd graders, if they are

given a blank piece of paper and told to make a shield – half the kids just stare at it. However, if they see a sample of a brightly decorated, assembled shield, they catch the vision of “Oh, that’s what we’re doing!” and some (probably the boys) may even put on the shield and start some imaginative action.

- The craft is also a good visual reminder of the lesson when the kids go home – it may prompt the parent to inquire about what was learned --- so the lesson may reach both the child and the family. Okay – maybe I’ve overly optimistic about that.

### **STUDENT INVOLVEMENT:**

Wherever possible, I involve the students. They love to show what they know and they pay extra attention when *their* answers are put on the board. For example, for the “Praising God from A-Z” section of last year’s lessons, I wrote the pertinent letters of the alphabet, e.g. A, B, C, D, on the board and asked the kids to give me adjectives that described how great God was – “What would missionaries tell people about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit?” For each letter, the kids raised their hands and suggested words. I wrote down all of their suggestions and made a short comment about each. Invariably, the kids would come up with many more words than I had anticipated – some showed surprisingly mature understanding of God’s character. After they’d run out of ideas, I went back and circled the word from the lesson and re-emphasized the points from the lesson. The kids were much more attentive and interested than if I had been a “talking head”.

Last year, I also used the idea of student involvement when reviewing the 6 Roles. (Remember this was a third grade class.) We had several very bright kids who easily lost interest because they had already mastered the material. Also, our class liked to listen to their peers talk. So, for one lesson, I asked for volunteers during the craft time and took a half dozen kids aside. I paired them up and coached them about demonstrating the roles, e.g. welcomer. Then, at the beginning of the lesson, I had the students play-act the roles: the welcomer knocked on a pretend door, then when the other student answered the door, the welcomer introduced himself and asked the other child to come out and play soccer. The class then had to guess which role was being demonstrated.

Another week, I had some students draw pictures on the board of the role symbols and the class matched the role with the picture.

### **SPECIAL BACKGROUND:**

If you have traveled or if you know someone who has traveled, bringing pictures, maps, prayer wheels, clothing (e.g. Indian sari’s), games, food, material --- ad infinitum—into the class really makes an impact.

I'd really like to see the Oasis missions teachers exchange ideas and experiences in this area. If someone has special knowledge, they might be willing to "visit" the other classrooms.

### **VISUAL/TANGIBLE ELEMENTS:**

If you *haven't* traveled, the public library's children's section has great picture books and the librarian can help you look up "culture grams" which tell about the country at an age-appropriate level.

For the connector lesson, our class made paper-clip necklaces – these were our "connector necklaces" – during the class I'd ask the kids, "So what are you going to tell your parents when they ask you about the necklace?" By the end of class, they all could state what a connector was.

### **SMALL GROUP:**

For a while, our teaching team struggled with the "small group" portion of the lesson because it was difficult to get the kids to talk. They had trouble translating the lesson into concrete examples of things to pray about. To address this problem of "blank stares", I try to break down the lesson points into specific questions that the kids can discuss and pray about - trying to help relate the lesson to the kid's everyday life. For example, for the July 6th lesson, the small group leader will have the students take turns drawing one item from the "Prayer Toolbox". The leader will then prompt the child through three questions:

1. What is the item? (Show all the kids in the group.) e.g. airplane
2. What does it represent? e.g. travel (You might ask the child if he has even flown on a plane.)
3. What could we pray for missionaries or our missionary kid with regard to this? e.g. safe trip, skilled pilot, good weather, no lost luggage

Note: I view the small group time as *kid-talk* time. The leader should guide the conversation and elicit discussion but this isn't the time to re-teach the lesson.

### **GENERAL COMMENT:**

With regard to the class, here are a couple factors that I watch for:

- There can be a year's age difference between kids within one class. This affects attention span and level of maturity in social interaction.
- For second graders, there is a huge difference in reading levels between the beginning of the year and the end of the year. Early in the year, pictures and visuals are more effective than having them read long passages. At the beginning of the year, the students could read short excerpts or participate in skits; but, long passages would frustrate them and the other students would be bored. If the reading is necessary to the lesson, I have the student assistants help with the reading – letting the students be assist by holding up visual aids or acting out the passage.

### **FINAL NOTES:**

The time in the classroom is most effective when the *entire teaching team reads the lesson ahead of time, then arrives early so there is time to set up the classroom and pray together* before the first student arrives.

The Sundays that yield the most fruit are not necessarily the days when I am most prepared or when I feel that I was a great "presenter". Instead, they often are the days when I feel personally inadequate but somehow the Holy Spirit has enabled the team to work together and connect with each student.

In Christ,

Sarah