

Working on Worship 10

Using the Bible - Open the Book

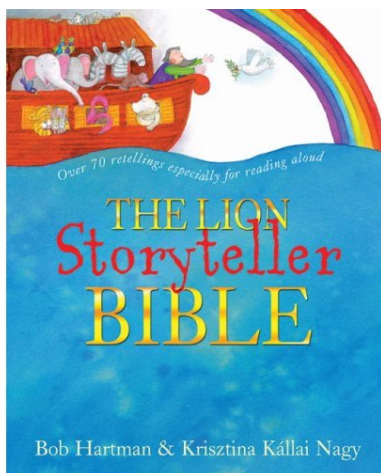
For Christians, the Bible is their key source for matters of faith and ideas of God. It tells the story of salvation and records the life of Christ and the teachings of the early church. Its pages contain material that has informed and forged Western culture. As a book it has been translated into more languages than any other throughout history with new translations still being made.



Collective Worship in schools is a good place to share the stories and teachings of the Bible and to provide time to consider them in relation to life and living. Ignorance of such an important and influential book can not be condoned whatever the faith background of staff or pupils.

Good, lively but also reflective ways of sharing Bible stories with children is something many schools are looking for and the 'Open the book' Project has provided the solution in many areas of the country. The Project has introduced children (and in many cases adults) to the stories the Bible contains. It has also proved highly successful in helping schools forge links with local Christian churches, provided useful links for RE lessons and strengthened community relations.

What is "Open the Book"?



"Open the Book" is a series of 90 or more ten-minute Bible stories presented weekly in collective worship (school assembly) over three school years. It has become a national project and has been running for several years in East Anglia with many schools now having a team of storytellers.

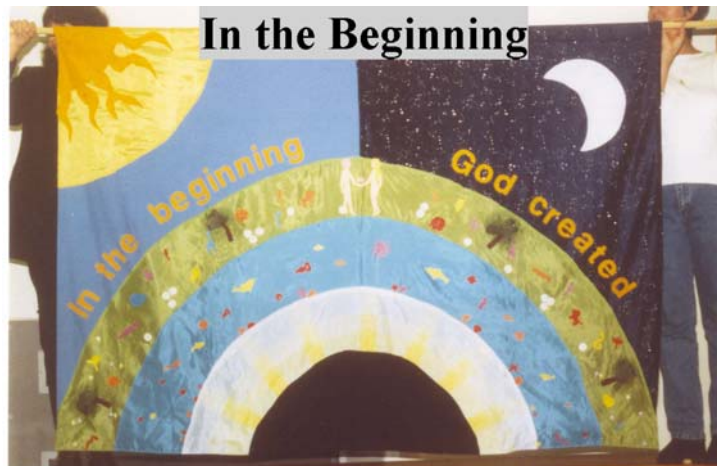
The stories are from the child-friendly "Lion Storyteller Bible" written by Bob Hartman, the internationally-known children's storyteller. Currently the first 30 short stories give "The Big Picture" of the Bible from Genesis to Acts. The second and third years cover "Jesus and the Early Church" and

“Heroes, Heroines and Children in the Bible”.

How did ‘Open the Book’ start?

It began as the vision of one man in Bedford with the commitment and energy to galvanise others into action. The first year of “Open the Book” began in September 1999 and rapidly spread to more than sixty schools in and around Bedford. Over that period more than 250 people from different local churches have worked together in local teams as storytellers. Gloucester schools took on the project and it spread equally quickly there. A National Co-ordinator and organization is now pulling together all the different groups which sprang from the original idea.

The “Open the Book” family now stretches from Jersey to Aberdeen, spread mainly by storytellers and head teachers telling others! In Suffolk there are a large number of teams working in Bury and Ipswich but also in the rural areas. Norfolk and Cambridgeshire also have teams.



The local RE advisers and the Diocesan Schools' Adviser are all happy with the project and several are actively involved in setting up training and encouraging the development of new local teams.

How does the project operate in school?

The stories are told by teams of volunteers from local churches, trained and either locally or nationally. Drama is used to bring the stories to life with thought being given to involving all the children present, maybe with actions or sounds. The stories may be accompanied by visual aids and costumes, made locally by a props team, and shared by several storytelling teams.



The storytellers have a “how-to-do-it” booklet written by an experienced teacher to reflect the nature of school assemblies. They are also given a short one paragraph introduction to use and a prayer or QMFR (Quiet Moment for Reflection) usually linked to an ‘I wonder’ type question for children to think

about. The introduction to the prayer / QMFR is carefully worded to show respect to the different backgrounds of those present.

In summary:

- *Open the Book* is offered **without charge** to primary schools.
- The first 30 stories follow **in sequence** from the Bible. The only exception is telling the Christmas story at Christmas-time.
- Each team brings with it a **set of visual aids**.
- Teams go into schools on a **regular day of the week**, agreed in advance. *Props are often shared with other teams and may be needed in other schools so varying the day can be difficult once a team begins to visit regularly.*
- Schools can request a **timetable** which shows which story will be told each week.
- Stories take about **10 minutes** and are offered *within* a school assembly. Teams only tell the story and lead a short prayer or thought at the end, whichever is appropriate. *Some teams offer a song, maybe with actions, if schools would like this.*
- The storytellers come as **invited guests** at the head teacher's discretion.
- **CRB checks** are encouraged.



The 'Open the Book' Code of Practice

To ensure storytellers stay within the legal requirements for Collective Worship, each 'Open the Book' team agrees to:

- ★ present the story simply i.e. to offer a Bible story, not a sermon
- ★ liaise closely with their allocated school, for example, over timing
- ★ prepare stories to the best of their ability
- ★ show respect and sensitivity to those of other faiths, and of none
- ★ be on time and keep to time
- ★ make minimal demands on the school.
- ★ bring their own visual aids *and* take them away (unless it is negotiated to leave the visual aids for a short while until the next team collects)

What are the benefits of 'Open the Book'?

If you read through a selection of Ofsted and SIAS Reports, you will find positive mention of local 'Open the Book' teams. The benefits of an 'Open the Book' team are not just those of impressing the inspection team, however. For teachers and other school professionals, this project has become a valuable resource, providing a strong, regular and long-running feature for assembly times. It has become an opportunity

for local churches to work together to serve pupils and teachers, and to share the Bible stories which mean such a lot to them as Christians. It is not an opportunity for evangelism and a strict code of conduct is used for each storytelling team.

for schools to engage positively with stories which are important culturally for all pupils to know, to meet members of both of the Christian faith and the local community, and to build links for the children with familiar faces, who might later be invited back to an RE lesson or met on a visit to a church.

Some schools invite their 'Open the Book' team to visit for one year. Others have enjoyed it so much that they go on with a second and third year, covering 90 or more Bible stories in all.

What do the children think?

Here are the thoughts of two children:

- **Wednesday is my favourite day because it's the Open the Book assembly** – overheard in a school corridor
- **It makes the stories seem as if they're really happening** - Year 4 pupil Gloucester

Where can we find out more?

'Open the Book' now has a national website; a large proportion of the website is available to the general public but the stories, support and resource sections are only open to those signed up as members.

Website address: <http://www.openthebook.net/contact.php>

If you want to contact 'Open the Book' directly, then make enquiries to the National Co-ordinator Dianne Brookes:

- by e-mail: enquiries@openthebook.net
- by post: **22 Honeysuckle Drive, Abbeymead, Gloucester GL4 4DU**
- by phone, **01452 539957**

Locally in East Anglia, you can also contact your Diocesan Schools' Team. Suffolk has several local leaders. Contact the co-ordinator:

Barbara Gallagher 01449 711337 or barbarajg@btopenworld.com