

LESSON 1: Life is Mystery

AIM

Children will be helped to develop an understanding of the term 'mystery'. (3.1.8)

OUTCOME

Learners approach life with attitudes of reverence, awe and wonder.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * Poem(s) (2) ⇒
- * Crystals or seeds growing (4)
- * Bibles (5)
- * Masks (6)

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 When we think about our world, we have many **questions** that buzz around in our heads. Invite the learners to formulate a question beginning, "I wonder..." Here are some examples of what they may come up with. Add one or two of your own if they find it difficult:
 - I wonder how the world began.
 - I wonder why innocent people and children suffer.
 - I wonder what happens when we are asleep.
 - I wonder where we go to when we die.
- 2 Point out that this kind of question has bothered people of every age and generation. Read one or both of the **poems** provided below. Ask the children to reflect on them. ⇒
- 3 **The term 'mystery'**: The word comes from a long time ago (Greek - *mysterion*, Latin - *mysterium*). It means something hidden which has been revealed or something unknowable which offers true understanding. Basically it refers to a hidden truth. Human beings often try to express mystery in symbols because they seem to bring us closer to an understanding.
- 4 **Demonstrate**: There is a hidden truth in every living thing. It is the growth of the thing that reveals the mystery. Make this point by growing crystals or seeds in the classroom. In the same way the truth of life and of our beings will be more and more revealed or made plain as we grow.
- 5 **Mystery in the Bible**: Jesus knew that we would find it difficult to understand the truth of his message and so he also used symbols. He spoke of the Kingdom of God as:
 - a mustard seed [Matthew 13:31-32]
 - yeast [Matthew 13:33]
 - a sower and his seed [Matthew 13:24-30]

Jesus also spoke sometimes in mysterious terms, for example, see John 12:23-26. When Jesus wanted to wash Peter's feet he said to him, "What I am doing you cannot understand now, but afterwards you will understand it." [John 13:7] The miracles that Jesus performed are also signs of mystery.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 6 **Masks:** You could ask the children to come to the class wearing masks, preferably of their own making. Masks create a sense of mystery. They raise the question: Who is behind the mask? It is interesting that our word 'person' comes from the Latin 'persona' which means 'mask'. We often use our faces to mask what we are actually feeling or experiencing. We use masks of all kind to keep our deeper selves hidden and mysterious for all except those who are close to us and whom we trust.
- 7 Invite the learners to **write their own poems** after the style of the two used in this lesson.

MATERIALS

I WONDER

I wonder why the grass is green,
Why the wind is invisible,
Who taught the birds to build
The nests? And also made
The trees to stand still and rest?

Who paints the rainbow in the sky
And makes the clouds up high?
Who forms all the stars in the sky?
And when the moon is not a round,
Where can the other piece be found?

(Nomsa Dlamini)

WHO HAS SEEN THE WIND?

Who has seen the wind?
Neither I nor you:
But when the leaves hang trembling
The wind is passing thro'.

Who has seen the wind?
Neither you nor I:
But when the trees bow down their heads,
The wind is passing by.

(Christina Rossetti)

LESSON 2: Can I See God?

AIM

To help the learners understand that God is seen through the gift of faith, and become familiar with the idea of God revealed in creation (2.1.7)

OUTCOME

Learners understand how faith enables one to see what is not visible.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 **Signs:** Invite learners to tell how we use signs in everyday life. We use signs to show how we feel (a handshake, a smile, a hug, a kiss, a gift, a peace sign), to give directions (traffic signs), or to stand for things (a candle, incense). Ask for examples. List them on the board, and next to each, what it means.

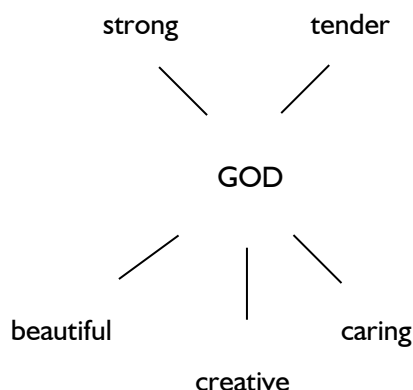
Signs are things or actions which point beyond themselves to something else.
- 2 **God is Spirit:** The Old Testament name for God, Yahweh, means 'I am who I am'. This name does not tell us much, except that God exists, but people have always wondered about their creator. God is Spirit and cannot be seen or heard or felt with the human senses. How then can we get to know God?
- 3 **Faith:** The way we get to know God is by looking at creation, not so much with our eyes only, but with our hearts. Faith helps us understand that the world around us in all its mysterious beauty serves as a sign of the One who created it. Creation points to God. ⇨
- 4 **Guided Experience:** Take the learners outside to collect articles from nature that make them think about their Creator - things that they can *feel*, things that are rough, smooth, soft, warm, or beautiful. Explain to learners that this must be a silent, prayerful exercise, as they need their inner sense of God to guide them in their choice. Teacher must accompany learners to keep them focused. If this is not possible, bring to the class a selection of such objects for the learners to choose from.
- 5 **Reflection:** On returning, ask each learner to sit quietly in a circle around a table cloth you have laid on the floor. In the middle of the cloth is a lighted candle. Quiet background music will add to the atmosphere. Each learner will place the article they selected on the table cloth, one at a time. Encourage them to explain why they chose it and how it made them feel. A stone, for example, may be a sign of God's strength that makes the learner feel safe and protected. A flower can be a sign of God's tenderness and beauty that makes the learner feel special. A stalk of grass is another kind of evidence of the infinite variety of God's imagination. When each learner has had a turn, round off the exercise by adding a flashcard to the display, bearing the words: CREATION POINTS TO GOD.



WHAT YOU NEED

- * A selection of natural objects (4)
- * Coloured table cloth (5)
- * Candle and matches (5)
- * 🎵 Quiet background music (5)
- * Flashcard: CREATION POINTS TO GOD. (5)
- * Ndebele prayer (7)
- * Bible (7)
- * 📖 Poem worksheet (8)(9)(11) ⇨
- * 🎵 *All Creation Bless the Lord* or *Song of Creation* (12)

- 6 **Portrait of God:** Use the responses of the learners to build a picture of God in the following manner -



- 7 **Prayer:** End the experience with a prayer of thanksgiving for the wonders of creation. You may like to use the extract from the Ndebele prayer below:

Creator! Who sews the heavens together like a cloth,
 You are the one who calls the branching trees into life,
 You make new seeds grow out of the ground,
 so that they will grow tall and strong,
 You have filled the land with many people.

Alternatively, you may choose an extract from Psalm 104. Suggested verses: 1-4, 10-15, 9-24, 30-31

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- 8 Distribute copies of Weldon Johnson's **poem** *The Creation*. Involve learners in reading the poem and discussing its meaning. 📖
- 9 Divide the poem into sections and the learners into groups to present the poem as a **choral verse**. 📖
- 10 Invite the learners to **write a response** to the guided experience in ACTIVITY 4.
- 11 The groups decide on a symbol to represent the verses of the poem that they presented and they design a **poster**. 📖
- 12 **Songs:** *All Creation Bless the Lord* or *Song of Creation*

TO REMEMBER

Faith is a gift from God that enables a person to accept God's word, and to see things in its light.

The Creation

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely –
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in his hands,
And God rolled the light around in his hands,
Until he made the sun;
And he set the sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God himself stepped down –
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his head,
And the earth was under his feet.
And God walked, and where he trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then he stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And he spat out the seven seas –
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings flashed
He clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled –
And the waters above the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,

The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared
and curled itself around his shoulder.

Then God raised his arm and he waved his hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And he said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop his hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said, That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at his sun,
And he looked at his moon,
And He looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said, I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down –
On the side of the hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till he thought, I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;
Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

(James Weldon Johnson)

LESSON 3: God Is Three-in-One


AIM

To help the learners develop the concept of God as Trinity (2.1.5) [LO2]

OUTCOME

Learners are familiar with the concept of God as a Trinity.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- 1 Introduction:** Remind learners that in the last lesson we looked for signs of God's presence in creation. We saw that creation, when seen through the eyes of faith, does reveal something about what God is like. Since God wants us to know what she is like, she reveals herself to us in other ways too.
- 2 Scripture:** Scripture tells the story of God and humankind. In the part of Scripture we call the New Testament we meet Jesus who shows us what God is like. The worksheet contains the following references: Mark 1:9-11; John 1:1-3; John 1:14; John 16:7,13. Help the learners in reading these passages to identify the persons in them.  ⇨

These passages reveal God as:



Creator who made all things.
 Son (Word) who redeems or saves the world.
 Holy Spirit (Advocate or Comforter) who sanctifies or makes holy.

Christians therefore understand that there are three persons in one God. We say that God is a Trinity or tri-unity (three-in-one).
- 3 The Nature of God is a Mystery:** Can we explain what Trinity means? We can, and must, try to get a better understanding, though we must also realise that God is the biggest mystery there is.

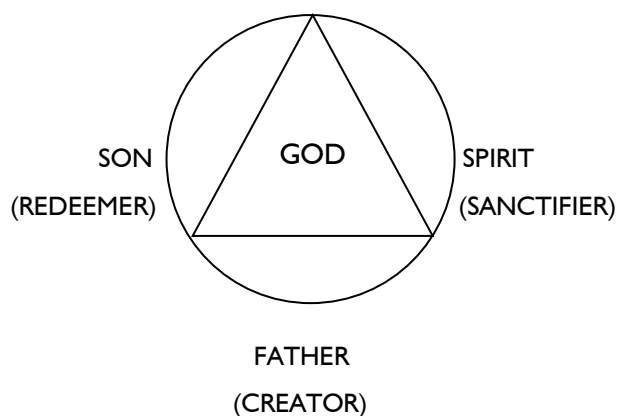
There is a story of the great Saint Augustine who lived in North Africa more than a thousand years ago. He was walking along the beach, deep in thoughtful prayer, trying to understand the mystery of three persons in one God. He came upon a young boy who was pouring bucket after bucket of sea water into a hole he had made in the sand. Augustine asked him what he was trying to do. "I am emptying the ocean into this hole," said the boy. "But that is impossible to do," replied Augustine. The boy looked up at him and spoke with a friendly smile: "But not nearly as impossible as your trying to understand the mystery of God!"
- 4 Understanding Trinity:** Draw a large triangle on the board. Write Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the three corners. Explain that the triangle, though one shape, is made up of three lines and angles. Another way of seeing trinity is by looking at ourselves. Remind the learners that we are made in God's own image. We would therefore expect to know something about the nature of God by looking at ourselves. In what way are we a trinity? We are body, we are mind, and we are soul or spirit. We can act, we can think, we can love.



WHAT YOU NEED

- *  Worksheet (2)(7) ⇨
- * Story (3)
- * Diagram illustrated for the learners (5)
- * Colouring pens and pencils (5)
- *  *Father, in My Life I See* or the *Peruvian Gloria* (6)
- * Bible (8)(9)

- 5 **Practical Activity:** Children draw a circle, and, inside it, a triangle as illustrated. Inside the triangle they write the word GOD in decorative script. In the three sectors outside the triangle they write FATHER (CREATOR), SON (REDEEMER), and SPIRIT (SANCTIFIER). They could also include symbols like a hand for the Father, a cross or star for the Son, and a dove or a flaming tongue for the Holy Spirit. The pictures are then coloured and decorated in whatever way the learners fancy.



- 6 **Prayer and Song:** Conclude with the traditional prayer of praise called the *Glory Be*:

Glory be to the Father,
 And to the Son,
 And to the Holy Spirit,
 As it was in the beginning is now,
 and ever shall be, world without end.
 Amen.

Follow this by singing *Father, in My Life I See* or the *Peruvian Gloria*

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

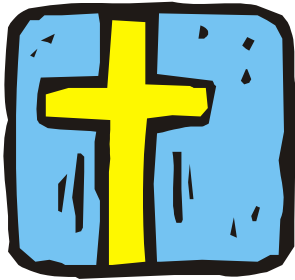
- 7 Tell learners to choose the **Scripture reference** from the worksheet that they like best and to copy it out in a neat frame. Ask them to explain what it is about the reference that made them choose that particular one. 📖
- 8 Encourage learners to make a **bookmark** with the words of Mark 1:10-11 or Mark 9:7 on it.
- 9 Discuss the fact that all religions have special signs for the times when people communicate with God. In some places of worship, for example, people are expected to remove their shoes, in others, they bow in a certain direction, or put on prayer shawls. Upon entering a church or beginning prayer Catholics usually make what is called the **Sign of the Cross** [see Matthew 28:19]. This sign, with the accompanying words (given below), reminds one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith: that God is three-in-one, and that God, in the person of Jesus, God's Son, became human and died for our sakes.

What is God Like?



In the beginning was the **Word**:
and the Word was with **God**
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.

[John 1:1-3]



And the **Word** became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory of the **Father's** only **Son**,
full of grace and truth.

[John 1:14]



It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the **Spirit**, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, 'You are my beloved **Son**; with you I am well pleased.'

[Mark 1:9-11]

But I tell you the truth,
it is better for you that I go.
For if I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you.
But if I go, I will send him to you.
When he comes, the Spirit of truth,
he will guide you to all truth.

[John 16: 7, 13]