Dear Friends:

Welcome to the 2006 VBS Fair! For those of you who can’t visit our display in Alexandria, Virginia, we are offering this information on the web.

This year we reviewed over 20 VBS curricula for you. Some were published for sale in 2006 only; others are undated and are still in print.

We would like to call your attention to our “Top Picks.” These merit serious consideration based on the following criteria:

1) Theology: the love of God is emphasized more than the sinfulness of humans.
2) Unity: a distinctive theme supports a cohesive program of stories & activities.
3) Inclusiveness: text and graphics represent all God’s people with respect and stereotypes are avoided.

There may be other factors that are important to your parish. We recognize that particular criteria may lead you to choose a curriculum other than one of our Top Picks.

The attached list of VBS curricula we reviewed gives a brief description, some strengths & weaknesses, and publisher/price information for each program.

Thank you for visiting our website. We welcome your suggestions and feedback.

Sincerely yours,

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VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL FAIR
FEBRUARY 2006

LIST OF PUBLISHERS AND PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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CMT Top Picks:

All Aboard Gospel Express ................................................................. 5
Around the World in 5 Days: A Visit to the U.S.A. ......................... 6
Aslan is on the Move! ....................................................................... 7
Good Life Curriculum: 5 Lessons to Nurture Simplicity within Christian Communities ......................................................... 8
Jesus Friends .................................................................................... 9
Journey into the Hush Arbor: Living in the Imagination of God ...... 10
Wizards and Wonders: A Hero’s Journey with Harry Potter ........ 11

Other Reviewed Programs:

Adventure of the Treasure Seekers .................................................. 13
Arctic Edge: Where Adventure Meets Courage .............................. 14
Birth & Childhood Stories of Jesus .................................................... 15
Festival of Faith ............................................................................... 16
First Action Heroes ........................................................................ 17
Genesis 1: Space Probe .................................................................. 18
Group’s Fiesta! Where kids are fired up about Jesus .................... 19
Holy Land Adventure ....................................................................... 20
Jesus Family Reunion ...................................................................... 21
Let’s Get Fit with Jesus ................................................................... 22
MEGA Sports Camp: Go the Distance ............................................ 23
Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God .................................... 24
SonTreasure Island .......................................................................... 25
Time-Stone Travelers: Quest for God’s 10 Commandments ........ 26
Trading Places: Where Jesus Makes a World of Difference ........ 27
Treasure Cove: Discover the Riches of Christ .............................. 28
Under Construction: A Habitat for Humanity VBS ................. 29
CMT
TOP PICKS
All Aboard Gospel Express
Augsburg Fortress
800.328.4648
www.augsburgfortess.org

Gospel Express: All Aboard God’s Celebration Train is a Gospel-centered Vacation Bible School program. Children experience Bible stories through an interactive combination of music, art, snacks, games, worship, and drama. At Gospel Express, Jesus is the lead conductor. Daily themes and Bible stories celebrate what Jesus has done for us by arriving, surprising, forgiving, loving, and blessing. Learners experience age appropriate worship that is kid-friendly, Bible stories, games, interactive videos, crafts, dramatic activities, songs, and a meaningful mission project in this rotation style Vacation Bible School.

Age Levels:  
Preschool  
Kindergarten-Grade 1  
Grades 2-4  
Grades 5-6

Includes:  
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
- Music Training DVD  
- Music CD  
- Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
- Promotes a loving God.
- Offers daily schedules for a variety of VBS settings.
- Provides a mission opportunity for learners.
- Take-home cards offer ideas for family activities as well as access to additional games and activities on website.
- Provides upbeat music that includes several traditional hymns.
- Uses echo style for prayers and Bible verse memorization.
- Offers a classroom-style preschool program.
- Offers multiple daily craft suggestions that are appropriate for each grade group.
- Encourages older youth participation.
- Offers creative ways of retelling the Bible stories with active participation by the learners.
- Incorporates the use of various musical instruments as well as a selection of grade appropriate hand motions and movement.
- Bible book illustrations are creative and multi-cultural.
- Grants permission to duplicate music CD (needs to be purchased separately).

Weaknesses:
- Additional expenditures: Bible books, a music CD, and a DVD are required purchases but not included in the starter pack.
- Requires considerable effort and preparation by teachers because of the variety of grade level activities.

-LLD
The purpose of this program is to awaken in children a heart for mission. It joins the previous two versions of *Around the World in 5 Days*, both of which featured international destinations and are still available for purchase. This edition features mission stories in five locations within the USA: Pasadena, CA; Florida; Alaska; Louisville, KY and Chicago, IL. It uses a boat theme, with children meeting each morning on the Dock where they receive tickets for their destination that day.

**Age Levels:** 4-10 years (preschool – grade 5)
Designed for rotation in either age-specific or multi-age groups.

**Includes:**

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**

- Teaches the biblical commands related to mission – sharing the good news, hospitality, prayer, generosity and service – and increases participant awareness of how the church works to carry out those commands.
- Offers an opportunity to learn the geography, history and culture of the five states – as well as the diversity of the United States – in an entertaining way.
- Uses six simple mission songs, all of which are sung daily. One is based on Psalm 118 (“This is the day”) because we share the good news joyfully.
- One simple 3-ring notebook gives detailed directions for all crafts, snacks, games, music and stories, as well as maps and flags of the five locations. The notebook also gives, for the director, a planning calendar, schedule, job descriptions, and setup & decorating ideas.
- Each day, along with the Bible story, children hear a “mission letter” written specifically for this program by a missionary in one of the five locations.
- Offers the option of an adult class on the five mission locations.

**Weaknesses:**

- Requires considerable creative effort to set up the Dock, the five boats and their stations. Travel posters and souvenirs from the five locations need to be collected.
- All five mission locations are Presbyterian. Other denominations will probably want to modify the program to include their own mission activity.

-MJD
Aslan is on the Move!
Leader Resources
800.941.2218
www.LeaderResources.org

This creative intergenerational curriculum uses C.S. Lewis’ beloved fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to explore theology. A 5-day lesson plan makes it suitable for VBS.

C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia series “as an unconscious preparation of the imagination” to explore the deep power of faith and belief. Acting in the imagination prepares us to respond in faithful ways when in our real lives we are confronted with meanness and treachery.

Themes of the five days are:
Day 1: Discovery of Narnia: how ideas about reality color behavior.
Day 2: Discovery of the Beavers and the abiding hope that Aslan will return: how values lead to action.
Day 3: Father Christmas and Spring return; Aslan greets the troop at the Stone Table, and Peter wins his first battle: how fear and love affect actions, and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.
Day 4: Aslan and the Witch strike a bargain: the meaning of a willing sacrifice, abiding belief, grief and joy.
Day 5: Joy of Coronation: how this adventure expresses truth and reality for us and connects to familiar celebrations.

**Age Levels:** Intergenerational

**Includes:**
- **X** Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- ___ Music CD
- ___ Skits/Drama DVD
- Music Action Training DVD

**Strengths:**
- Offers opportunity for profound new understandings about life for all ages.
- Creates a magical VBS with the lamppost, the wardrobe door, Turkish Delight, and all the other fantasy elements from the story.
- Includes many active games plus discussion questions.

**Weaknesses:**
- Does not include the Bible or church history.
- Constructing props calls for creative use of materials and space.

-MJD
Good Life Curriculum: 5 Lessons to Nurture Simplicity within Christian Communities
Alternatives for Simple Living
800-821-6153
www.SimpleLiving.org

Based on the Five Life Standards of Living More with Less by Christine Battjes, this curriculum is designed to teach positive life lessons to counter cultural forces that erode Christian values. Learners are invited to gather and worship with lots of music and a dramatic Scripture presentation. They then move on to participate in active games, which are opportunities for learners to experience the lesson in body and soul as well as exploring the reflection questions at the end. Learners will then break into small groups and explore the theme for the day in a more concrete way. Sometimes a story is used, sometimes learners are asked to do a short project; whatever the form, the purpose is to teach the participants the five standards of living simply. Finally, participants are given a variety of options that provide a chance to put the lesson of the day into action. Collecting food, writing a letter for peace and justice, making a recycled sculpture, or creating a family or personal pledge are just a few of the choices available.

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:  
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD  ___ Music Action Training DVD  
- Music CD  ___ Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:  
- Emphasizes a loving God.  
- Is creative and theologically sound.  
- Provides simple and lively music.  
- Created for children or intergenerational gatherings.  
- Designed to be used for Vacation Bible School, camps, midweek school, or confirmation supplement.  
- Designed to teach positive life lessons based on five standards of living simply:  
  1. Do justice.  2. Cherish the natural order.  3. Learn from the world community.  4. Nurture people.  5. Nonconform freely.  
- Upbeat and entertaining scripture drama is presented daily.

Weaknesses:  
- Geared toward older elementary school aged children.  
- Snack ideas are not included in the curriculum.  
- Craft ideas are not included in the curriculum.  
- Requires considerable preparation by teachers.  
- Game ideas are not outdoor/active games.

-LLD
Jesus Friends
Mennonite Publishing Network
800.245.7894
www.mph.org/vbs

The goal of Jesus Friends is to teach children how to reach out "across the street and around the world." This flexible five-day curriculum helps children grow to become "Jesus Friends" by exploring five themes: Jesus friends know God; Jesus friends share; Jesus friends care; Jesus friends invite; Jesus friends go.

Each day begins with a worship service that includes a Bible drama based on a story of Jesus’ relationship with someone: the disciples, a child, a sick person, his friends Mary and Martha, and God. A special feature of Jesus Friends is a series of rotational Friendship Stations. These stations provide active learning and response opportunities for learners based upon the daily Bible readings and discussion.

Age Levels:  
Early Childhood (Pre-K)  
Primary (grades 1-2)  
Middler (grades 3-5)  
Junior (grades 6-8)

Includes:  
Clip Art/Reproducible CD  Music Action Training DVD  
Music CD  Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:  
- Emphasizes a loving God.  
- Is creative and theologically sound.  
- Provides brief Bible backgrounds for each lesson.  
- Easy-to-use.  
- Includes opening and closing worship that matches daily themes.  
- Provides simple and lively songs.  
- Uses sign language to help learners memorize the bible passage for the week.  
- Offers a separate preschool/kindergarten curriculum.  
- Offers a variety of examples for multiple formats and settings.  
- Offerings are collected in containers that are symbols from the Bible story/drama of the day.

Weaknesses:  
- Snack ideas are not included in the curriculum.  
- Game ideas are not included in the curriculum.
Journey into the Hush Arbor: Living in the Imagination of God.

Abingdon Press
800.672.1789 (Cokesbury)
www.cokesbury.com

This is the fourth edition of Hush Arbor, a unique VBS resource that combines concepts from the African-American heritage with Biblical concepts of journey, freedom and hope. A hush arbor was a secret place created by slaves where they could worship God and pray for freedom under cover of darkness. This year’s program features the hush arbor as a place of creativity and freedom, where even enslaved peoples are able to live with hope in the imagination of God. The daily themes foster hope, leadership, relating and listening to Jesus, and sharing. The materials are flexible: they can be used for either traditional age groupings or an intergenerational program, and in either a classroom-based or rotational format.

Age Levels:
- Preschool – K
- Younger Elementary
- Older Elementary

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD

One music CD is African spirituals and the other is contemporary music produced by hip-hop artist Ricky B.

Strengths:
- Each day is a lively mix: a Bible story is paired with an African proverb, an African-American spiritual, a contemporary hip-hop song, and games or skits from the African-American heritage. Foods and crafts usually relate to either the Bible story or the African heritage.
- Materials are clear, complete and well-organized. They include recruiting and training tips, sample schedules and worship scripts for the director; musical scores and movement charts for the music & movement leader; supply lists and directions for the arts & crafts leader; drama scripts and game directions for the heritage/drama leader; daily lesson plans for each of the age-group leaders, and a manual for outreach and follow-up after the VBS.
- The stories were selected for their imaginative imagery – Jacob’s ladder, Elijah’s chariot, Jesus’ transfiguration – and their ability to inspire faith and hope.

Weaknesses:
- The African-American focus will tend to limit Hush Arbor’s use, although its themes and activities are universal in appeal and its theology is sound.

-MJD
Wizards and Wonders: A Hero’s Journey with Harry Potter
Leader Resources
800.941.2218
www.LeaderResources.org

This Vacation Bible Experience uses the popular Harry Potter to explore theologically
life’s journey as a path to the inner self and to the Creator. The curriculum connects
Harry Potter’s experiences and Biblical teachings. For example, the New Testament
teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven is all around us and in us, and Jesus advises: “Let
he who has ears hear and he who has eyes see.” Likewise, in Harry Potter the Mugwump
World – representing magic with its possibilities for transformation – is all around and in
the midst of the Muggles, but they do not see it.

The five sessions and the daily Bible stories are:
Day 1: Platform 9-3/4
Moses is called by God (Exodus 2-4)

Day 2: Quidditch
Jesus calls his disciples (Matthew 4, 9, 10; Mark 1,2,3; Luke 5,6); also
One body, many parts (Paul’s letter to the Corinthians)

Day 3: A Night in the Forbidden Forest
Elijah and the still, small voice (1 Kings 19:9-15)

Day 4: Snares, Dares and Potions
Temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4)

Day 5: The Mirror of Erised
The Resurrection (The Baptismal Covenant)

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD ___ Music Action Training DVD
___ Music CD ___ Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
• Inclusion of a Hogwarts Acceptance Letter for each child, the Sorting Hat, Prof.
  McGonagall’s Invisibility Cloak, Owl Mail Delivery and other wonders from the
  imaginary world of Harry and Hermione.
• Opportunity for children to learn a lot about themselves (in “identity” exercises)
  and to gain confidence for the life journey ahead of them.
• Theological background for each day is provided for the leaders.
• Includes lots of active games and the Hogwart Song.

Weaknesses:
• Requires free-spirited leaders.
• Requires advance preparation of space and materials.

-MJD
OTHER REVIEWED PROGRAMS
Adventure of the Treasure Seekers
Cokesbury
800.251.8591
www.cokesbury.com

*Adventure of the Treasure Seekers* is a Bible-based Vacation Bible School program that uses the fun and adventure of an archaeology dig as the theme. The objective is to help children discover and experience joy in knowing they are treasures in God’s eyes and loved beyond measure. Learners will experience five promises from God: God loves you, God knows you, God treasures you, God forgives you and God is with you. The themes are reinforced as children visit five different stations that emphasize the promises. Each day ends with “Reflection Time” in which Treasure Group leaders pull together everything learners have experienced during the day.

**Age Levels:**
- Preschool/Kindergarten
- Young Elementary
- Middle Elementary
- Preteen

**Includes:**
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- X Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD
- X Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**
- Promotes a loving God.
- Offers a variety of examples for multiple formats, groupings, as well as various scheduling formats.
- Offers both an interactive drama and storytelling option for retelling the Bible story.
- Provides upbeat music with movement and easy-to-learn hand motions.
- Focuses on mission with real stories of children who are involved in mission work in their own communities.
- Encourages congregation-wide mission project and offers alternative mission suggestions.
- Offers a separate preschool/kindergarten classroom style program.
- Uses sign language and a “Discovery Dig” for God’s promises to assist in Bible verse memorization.
- Encourages older youth participation in leadership roles.
- Easy to use.

**Weaknesses:**
- Requires additional expenditures: Field Notebooks, Adventure video/DVD, and Professor Whoo puppet.
- Uses graphics and activities in the pre-teen notebook that are too simplistic.

-LLD
Arctic Edge: Where Adventure Meets Courage
LifeWay
800.458.2772
www.lifeway.com/yourvbs

Arctic Edge was designed to develop biblical courage in children. Biblical courage is defined as facing dangers or difficulties with confidence in God. Participants encounter Biblical characters Elijah, Esther, Nicodemus, Saul, Ananias, Peter and John, each of whom encountered situations that required courage to follow God and demonstrate their faith. The setting is the Arctic region of Alaska, because it is a land of harsh living conditions that require courage. Throughout the program, the materials stress the A-B-Cs of becoming a Christian:

A - Admit to God that you are a sinner, and repent.
B - Believe that Jesus is God’s son and accept God’s gift of forgiveness
C - Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Age Levels:  Babies - 2
               3 – PreK
               Kindergarten
               Younger children
               Middle children
               Preteen
               Youth
               Adult

Includes:

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD = Mission

Strengths:
- Flexible: Manuals for leaders of crafts, music, decorating the space, and missions enable staff to run the VBS with some rotation or in traditional classrooms.
- Good assortment of indoor and outdoor games as well as snacks.

Weaknesses:
- Emphasis is on repenting your sins rather than on God’s love.
- The “biblical courage” promoted is primarily for proclaiming your faith to others. The nature of this evangelism makes it unsuitable for many parishes. Children of all ages are encouraged to make a decision for Christ. Converting Muslims to Christianity is also encouraged.
- The Bible stories selected are inappropriate for young children, even though they are re-told simply. Children from 1-year up hear the same stories of Elijah, Esther, etc. as older children and adults, and they are taught the same themes of courage.

-MJD
Based on *The Family Story Bible* by biblical storyteller Ralph Milton, this program provides imaginative lesson plans for the Christmas stories that can be used throughout the year. Don't wait for the seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany to try "Christmas in July." It’s just as meaningful when used during a summer Vacation Bible School. This resource can be used for church camps, midweek programs, or as a unit of focused learning within another program.

Learners gather daily around the cooking fire in the country where Jesus grew up to begin their day in worship. The various “responding centers” offer theme-related activities (snacks, crafts, group collages or banners, and an optional book center) that correspond to daily stories. At the end of each session, each child receives a special blessing from the teacher to help learners to remember and share what they have learned.

**Age Levels:** 3-10 year olds

**Includes:**

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Storytelling Video

**Strengths:**

- Emphasizes a loving God.
- Allows children to learn and develop faith at their own pace.
- Encourages learners to participate in the telling of the Bible story.
- Establishes a ritual of prayer and worship.
- Reinforces each child’s learning at the end of each session with “blessing” activity.
- Brings the whole congregation together with an optional seventh day celebration.
- Offers multiple storytelling options: reading, video version, or active storytelling.
- Draws children into the story by using “object clues.”
- Is easy to use.

**Weaknesses:**

- Does not include gimmicks with glitzy objects.

-LLD
Festival of Faith
Active Learning Assoc., Inc.
574.255.3570
www.alassociates.com

Festival of Faith invites children and their teachers to take part in the story of the Christian faith as it unfolds through the seasons of the Church Year. Each of the five days is devoted to a different season in the Church Year: Advent and Christmas; Epiphany; Lent and Easter; Pentecost; and Kingdomtide, also known as Ordinary Time or Late Pentecost. For each season there is a theme, scripture passage, and memory verse.

Children gain an understanding of the church as a global community through the activities in the lesson plans. Children are grouped according to “Embassies,” representing countries from the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia. Through the daily crafts and snacks children learn the customs of different countries. In large group opening and closing sessions, children learn the day’s theme and Bible story. The format includes an optional Ethnic Festival and Open House final program.

Age Levels: Children are placed in cross-age groups.
(The program is ungraded; appears suitable for grades Kindergarten – 6).

Includes:

___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD ___ Music Action Training DVD
___ Music CD ___ Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
- Children learn much about other countries as well as about the church year.
- Enticing range of crafts – from stained glass to boomerangs and decorated eggs.
- Bible stories are told interactively, as “echo stories.”
- Clear and complete instructions.

Weaknesses:
- Considerable advance preparation of materials is required.

-MJD
**First Action Heroes**

WordAction Publishing Company  
800.877.0700  
www.vbs2006.com

*The First Action Heroes* is a rotation-style Vacation Bible School program. Learners are invited to learn about God's desire to give them the super powers of Trust, Courage, Forgiveness, Obedience, and Love. The daily themes are reinforced as children spend the day playing games, creating crafts, eating super hero snacks, enjoying exciting stories about real Bible Heroes, and memorizing God's Word.

**Age Levels:**  
Early Childhood (ages 4 - 6)  
Elementary (ages 7 – 11)

**Includes:**  
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
- X Music Action Training DVD  
- X Music CD  
- ___ Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**  
- Promotes a loving God.  
- Provides an Education and Ministry statement.  
- Emphasizes Bible verse memorization by including a Bible Memory rotation site.  
- Easy to use.  
- Provides upbeat and lively songs with hand motions.  
- Upbeat and entertaining skits are presented daily at opening and closing ceremonies and lead into daily themes well.  
- Offers a separate Early Childhood education program for four, five and six year olds.  
- Provides a mission opportunity for learners.

**Weaknesses:**  
- Requires some additional expenditures: Activity books and Image CD.  
- Cartoon characters in activity books and take-home cards are not multi-cultural.

-LLD
Space Probe explores Genesis 1-9. VBS astronauts climb aboard time-traveling starships on a mission back to the beginning of time. In five days they learn that: God is their creator; they are made to worship God; sin has broken their relationship with God; they must decide whether to be Cain or Abel; and Noah’s story is a reminder to stay safely on the Jesus Ark.

Age Levels:
- 2’s – 3’s (designed for teachers’ children)
- 4’s – completed K
- 1st – 2nd graders
- 3rd – 4th graders
- 5th – 6th graders

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Skits/Drama DVD

Also a Song Overhead Set (to project lyrics)

Strengths:
- Exciting space theme: all children are “astronauts” and part of a “starship crew.” Classroom teachers are “capsule commanders.” Daily opening sessions are “lift offs” and closing sessions are “re-entries.”
- Clearly written Director’s Guide gives schedules, job descriptions, recruiting steps and other basics.

Weaknesses:
- The theology -- centered on sin, the Fall, judgment, and Jesus’ sacrifice and atonement – is not age appropriate. Fear of judgment and good behavior are emphasized more than a joyful response to life and God’s love.
- Parents supervise at home memory work, Bible reading and “lunar missions” (acts of kindness and helpfulness) – making this VBS feel a lot like real school.
- Emphasis on evangelism will make some children uncomfortable. Children win stickers for bringing friends and for being able to explain the “Salvation Flight Plan.”
- Sample packet does not include the music CD, the clip art/reproducible CD, the lyric overheads or the DVDs. Hence these materials are not reviewed. Using them -- plus the individual student logbooks @ $3.95 -- will add considerably to the total cost.
- Teaches children to have great certainty in their faith. One of the memory verses is: “I must believe by faith.” This approach will leave students unprepared to deal with their doubts and questions as they mature.

-MJD
Group’s Fiesta! Where kids are fired up about Jesus

Group Publishing
800.747.6060
www.groupvbs.com

Group’s Fiesta is a Bible-based rotation-style Vacation Bible School program. Children start each day in small mixed-age groups called Fiesta Crews. The Fiesta Crews gather to sing Bible songs, with motions, that introduce learners to the concepts they’ll be learning that day. Then Fiesta Crews visit five different Fiesta stations before coming back together to recap the daily Bible lesson. Children spend the week learning that: Jesus is our friend, Jesus is our life, Jesus is our leader, Jesus is our Savior, and Jesus is our helper. They also work on a special mission project.

Age Levels:  Preschool
              Mixed Age Elementary

Includes:

  X  Clip Art/Reproducible CD  X  Music Action Training DVD

  X  Music CD  X  Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

• Comes in Spanish edition.
• Offers daily schedules for a variety of VBS settings.
• Provides a mission opportunity.
• Encourages older youth participation.
• Offers learners the opportunity to perform special jobs, such as fiesta guide, materials manager, reader, coach, or prayer person.
• Provides an opportunity for children to prepare snacks for the entire VBS once during the week.
• Encourages Bible verse memorization, made easy with short bible verses and hand motions.
• Offers a separate preschool program.
• Offers a creative way of retelling Bible stories that requires learner participation.
• Upbeat music with movement and hand motions.
• Bible book illustrations are creative and multi-cultural.

Weaknesses:

• Requires additional expenditures: Bible books, an adventure DVD/VHS, a Skits & Drama CD, and multiple copies of a CD.
• Provides a Daily Challenge that emphasizes active evangelism which may create discomfort in some learners.
• Encourages learners to find ways to speak their faith to others, which could make some children uncomfortable.
• Some of the Bible stories are inappropriate for children and could be confusing or even frightening.

-LLD
Holy Land Adventure
Group Publishing
800.447.1070
www.groupvbs.com

This rotational VBS is based on the familiar stories of Jesus’ birth and a re-creation of the village of Bethlehem as it was in Jesus’ time. Participants are each assigned to a multi-age family called a tribe, named for one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Each day the whole group gathers for singing and a Bible story, after which the tribes visit the village playground, marketplace, and census taker and have snack and Tribe Time. The marketplace features shops such as a bakery, grain mill, mosaics and dye shops. Also in the marketplace, a drama team performs imaginative versions of the familiar birth stories, featuring Biblical characters such as Joseph as well as imagined characters such as an innkeeper and a midwife. Children are led to ponder Bible Points, such as why we need a savior and what it means to make room for him.

Age Levels: Intergenerational, preschool up.

Includes:

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

- Children can learn a lot about life in Jesus’ time.
- Offers a chance to study the beloved birth stories in summertime.
- Village of Bethlehem concept provides opportunity for interesting crafts, from perfume bottles to flute making and dying.
- Song CD offers a mixture of familiar carols and new songs, and provides both vocal and instrumental options.
- Village playground provides active play opportunities such as hopscotch and pebble toss.
- Drama team potentially could be very effective, assuming talented people with some drama experience can be recruited.
- Children would love the live animal barnyard.

Weaknesses:

- This is an ambitious undertaking involving marketplace set-up, costumes, drama team recruitment, and live animal barnyard.
- Potentially expensive, if you purchase the recommended tribal bandannas, banners, oil lamps, craft kits, etc.

-MJD
The theme of this VBS is God’s family: “I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18). Participants are taught that accepting Jesus Christ as Lord makes them a part of God’s family with benefits that will last throughout eternity. Jesus’ family celebrates the hope of the greatest family reunion of all time, when God will make a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1-7).

**Age Levels:**
- Preschool
- Primary
- Junior
- Teen

**Includes:**
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**
- The theme of belonging to Jesus’ family is appealing, and the stories and prayers model good family communication, forgiveness and acceptance.
- The theme is welcoming: You are invited! God wants you in his kingdom.
- Includes active, old-fashioned games like water balloon toss and red light/green light.
- Includes “family recipes” for snacks.
- Flexible: Can be used for a 5-lesson or 10-lesson VBS, and can be used in traditional classrooms or in a rotational schedule for some activities.

**Weaknesses:**
- Emphasis on need to be born again by accepting Jesus as the only way makes this VBS inappropriate for some parishes.
- Song disk has only one song, the Jesus Family Reunion theme song. Song book has eight songs but was not reviewed because not included in basic Director’s Package.
- Craft kits are purchasable, but the crafts do not allow for imaginative work.

-MJD
Let’s Get Fit with Jesus
R. H. Boyd Publishing
877.474.2693
www.rhboydpublishing.com

The objectives of this VBS are to teach the Bible, to nurture the faith and to witness to those who are lost and have not accepted God’s grace through Jesus Christ. The stress this year is on godliness as a way of life, on imitating Jesus’ way. The five daily lessons are: Good healthy speech; Exemplary conduct; Genuine love; Faith, and God’s promise.

The emphasis is on setting a good example and developing good behavior so that others will see God’s love in us.

Age Levels: Preschool (5 and under)
Primary (ages 6-8)
Junior (ages 9-12)
Intermediate (ages 13-17)

Includes:

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Craft supply packs are also available.

Strengths:

- The songs are popular spirituals, such as “Do Lord, oh do Lord...Remember Me” and “He’s Got the Whole World in his Hands,” which children would enjoy singing.

Weaknesses:

- Emphasis is on developing good behavior – God’s love gets lost in this program.
- Characters in the stories lack personality – they tend to be flat, either very well-behaved or quickly converted to good behavior.
- There are no physical games or activities except a daily “fitness march” for Preschool, despite the theme of fitness and illustrations of children jumping rope and lifting weights. Activities are workbook exercises such as fill-in-the-blank Bible passages.
- For the Preschool and Primary levels especially, the Bible passages and themes are not age appropriate.
- Craft kits are available for purchase, but the items made – yo-yos, puppets, craftstick toys – have no relationship to the lesson material.

-MJD
MEGA Sports Camp: Go the Distance
Gospel Publishing House
800.641.4310
www.MEGAsportscamp.com

MEGA Sports Camp is the easy, do-it-yourself sports outreach VBS. It lets kids do what they love—running, jumping, kicking, and singing. MEGA Sports Camp shows kids that church is a place to learn and to have fun, and encourages spiritual growth for every child who attends. It uses non-churchy, simple words to share God’s love and invites children to make Jesus their Savior.

Age Levels:  Early Elementary: Grades 1 and 2
Upper Elementary: Grades 3-6

Includes:
___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD  X  Music Action Training DVD
X  Music CD                ___ Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
• Easy to use.
• Reasonable cost for required materials and optional peripherals.

Weaknesses:
• Very little class time (20 minutes per day) as opposed to time for sports (105 minutes) and “Rally” periods (55 minutes), leaving scant time for children to ask questions and express opinions about daily Bible stories and talks by leaders.
• Pressures children to “accept Jesus as savior” in a conversion moment.
• Stresses children’s sinfulness more than the love of God; describes children who have not yet been “saved” as separated from God and unable to have a “friendship” with Jesus or God.
• The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in the materials.
• Teachers are told what to say to children and what type of responses to encourage in them.
• Comic books—for learners to take home—feature formulaic characters, foster conversion and sudden, personal salvation as the only way to God, and model one-on-one verbal “witnessing” as the unique method of spreading the gospel.
• Little mention of the needs of others, focusing instead on personal salvation as the goal of VBS.
• Expects teachers and leaders to have had a one-time conversion experience.

-GJK
Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God

Active Learning Assoc., Inc.
574.255.3570
www.alassociates.com

Pilgrimage transports students into the Middle Ages to journey as pilgrims to sites where they learn from the lives of people of faith. The Middle Ages stand out as a time when Christians journeyed in faith to distant locations as a way to deepen their experience of God and others.

On this pilgrimage, participants travel to the ultimate destination for God’s faithful people: the Kingdom of God. Over five sessions, learners find a road map that helps them to know themselves and others in new ways as they seek to know God as Creator, Savior and Holy Spirit.

Participants travel to five sites that were common destinations for medieval pilgrims: Rome, Italy; Canterbury, England; Santiago de Campostela, Spain; Dumfermline, Scotland; and Croagh Patrick, Ireland. Each day features not only a different destination but a different saint: St. Peter, Thomas Becket, James the Greater, Margaret of Scotland, and St. Patrick.

The heart of the daily experience is the Street Fair. Children become bakers, bookbinders, clothiers, painters, needle workers, stonemasons, woodworkers, and storytellers. As such, they participate in activities that are linked to the theme for the day. Guilds of students then meet to discuss their experiences in the Street Fair. The day closes with community singing, prayer, and worship.

Age Levels: Intergenerational, Kindergarten and up
(Ages 4 and younger need their own preschool group and some adaptation of materials)

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
- Children learn about medieval and church history as well as the lives of saints.
- Exciting medieval setting, with shields, street fairs, and crafts from woodworking to bookbinding.
- Important daily themes – such as “The Kingdom of God is within you” -- and memory verses.
- Clear and complete instructions.

Weaknesses:
- Requires considerable advance preparation for street fair activities.

-MJD
SonTreasure Island
Gospel Light
800.446.7735
www.gospellightvbs.com

Gospel Light’s SonTreasure Island is a rotation-style VBS curriculum in which learners spend the week at a Caribbean treasure hunt to discover God’s love as described in 1 Corinthians 13. Through their adventures children will discover that: God’s love is giving, God’s love is kind, God’s love is caring, God’s love is forgiving and God’s love is forever. Bible stories and activities at each site plus Bible verse memorization help to reinforce these lessons.

Age Levels:  Prekindergarten/Kindergarten (Ages 3-6)
              Primary (Ages 6-8)
              Middler (Ages 8-10)
              Preteen (Ages 10-12)

Includes:
          X  Clip Art/Reproducible CD  X  Music Action Training DVD
          X  Music CD                   X  Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:
  • Promotes a loving God.
  • Encourages follow-up activities with both church and the community.
  • Offers a variety of examples for multiple formats and settings.
  • Offers a separate preschool/Kindergarten curriculum.
  • Includes a special events section that contain ideas for expanding SonTreasure Island outside your congregation or beyond 5 days.
  • Encourages teen helpers.
  • Provides an optional Mission and Service rotation site.
  • Includes pre-teen enrichment ideas.
  • Easy to use.
  • Includes upbeat songs with hand motions.

Weaknesses:
  • Teaches that becoming part of God’s family depends on our actions, especially repentance, rather than baptism.
  • Bible stories lack imagination and creativity.
  • Additional expenditures: Activity books, Assemblies and Skit Production guide and DVD.

-LLD
Available in the New International or King James’ versions of the Bible, *Time-Stone Travelers: Quest for God’s 10 Commandments* teaches learners the wisdom and joy in following God’s 10 Commandments. Related Bible stories are learned by exploring five discovery sites, one each day, in different historic locations. The five “Discovery Sites” have been developed based on the locations in the *Time-Stone Travelers™* youth book series. Bible stories and activities at each site help children learn how to relate to God and others in respectful and loving ways.

**Age Levels:**  
Preschool  
Early Elementary (K – 1st grade)  
Elementary (2nd – 3rd grade)  
Upper Elementary (4th – 5th grade)

**Includes:**  
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
- Music CD  
- Music Action Training DVD  
- Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**  
- Emphasizes a loving God.  
- Is creative and theologically sound.  
- Provides simple and lively songs.  
- Offers a variety of examples for multiple formats and settings.  
- Provides a mission opportunity for learners.  
- Includes all resources in the starter pack, eliminating additional costs.  
- Is easy to use.  
- Offers a puppet option for opening skits and drama activates.  
- Includes an adult Bible study component.  
- Encourages Bible verse memorization, made easy with scheduled Bible memory activities.  
- Includes daily take-home page that reviews theme for the day and offers families activity ideas.

**Weaknesses:**  
- Outdoor game ideas are not included in the curriculum.

-LLD
Trading Places: Where Jesus Makes a World of Difference
Standard Publishing
(800) 566-6678
www.vacationbibleschool.com

*Trading Places* offers a variation of formats (classroom, modified classroom, and rotation) to accommodate any church setting. The camp promises to be a great adventure where children “trade places” with other children around the world, explore stories of biblical heroes and learn how Jesus makes a difference in their world. Daily lessons are: Be Loyal; Be Real; Be Brave; Be Ready; Be Changed.

**Age Levels:**
- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Primary
- Middler
- 4th and 5th grades
- Teen (appears to mean junior high/middle school)

**Includes:**
- [x] Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- [ ] Music Action Training DVD
- [x] Music CD
- [ ] Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**
- Teacher’s materials are easy to follow.
- Colorful appearance.
- Wide variety of activities.
- Teacher guides and student materials are affordable.
- Uses both Old and New Testament stories.

**Weaknesses:**
- Materials tend to be preachy and moralistic.
- Advocates childhood conversion.
- Literal interpretation of Bible, with no room for disagreement or discussion of opposing interpretations.
- Materials for upper elementary and teenagers are juvenile and “talk down” to students.

-GJK
Concordia’s *Treasure Cove* is a rotation-style VBS curriculum that invites kids to “discover the riches of God’s grace in Jesus”. The daily Bible themes are: Jesus is our Greatest Treasure (Jesus fed 5000 people; John 6:1-15); Jesus shows He is God's treasured Son (Jesus walked on water; Matthew 14:22-36); Jesus became poor to make us rich (Jesus washed the disciple’s feet; John 13:1-17); Jesus paid a great price to forgive our sins (the risen Jesus at the beach; John 21:1-19); Jesus treasures us (Paul's shipwreck; Acts 27:1-44).

**Age Levels:**  
Preschool  
Elementary (entering grade 1-6)

**Includes:**  
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**  
- Includes a youth and adult Bible study component.  
- Encourages writing a VBS purpose statement and defining goals.  
- Utilizes a treasure hunt using bible story clues to assist children in remembering the main ideas.  
- Offers a separate preschool curriculum.  
- Encourages teen helpers.  
- Provides a mission opportunity.  
- Includes upbeat songs with hand motions.  
- Teaches Bible memory verses with recorded rhythm and actions.

**Weaknesses:**  
- Portrays God as a punitive father.  
- Heavy emphasis on sin buries their emphasis on grace.  
- Cartoon characters in “Searcher guides” are neither creative nor multi-cultural.  
- Recorded narration of Bible stories may not appeal to older children.  

-LLD
The purpose of this curriculum is to create an environment which provides children the opportunity to participate in Christian community; to teach the value of Christian service, and to introduce children to the ministry of Habitat for Humanity.

The setting for this VBS is a construction site. Children assume the role of construction crew members and are divided into building crews of small groups that remain together for the week. The crews rotate among job sites:
- Blueprints – Bible activities
- Break Time – recreation and refreshments
- Scales & Measures – music
- Hard Hat Area – community crafts and projects
- Survey – community stories

Each day begins with the entire group assembled for a “briefing session,” which includes a dramatic presentation of the Bible story or theme for the day. Daily themes are drawn from *The Book of Acts* and daily Bible stories are drawn from both the Old and New Testaments. Stories are explored through music, art, games, hands-on activities, and worship at the job sites.

**Age Levels:** Pre-K
Grades 1 – 6

**Includes:**
- ___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- ___ Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD
- ___ Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**
- Combines the appeal of activity – sanding, pounding nails, and painting – with the satisfaction of giving and serving.
- Offers the opportunity for regular practice of stewardship, including daily collections.
- Has extensive treatment of the selected Bible stories.
- Melds a construction site, an attractive theme for children, with well-planned activities.

**Weaknesses:**
- Requires considerable daily preparation by teachers.

-MJD