

Gen. 1:1–5

Ps. 29

Acts 19:1–7

Mark 1:4–11

In the Beginning

**Goal for
the Session**

Tweens will worship God, the Creator of new beginnings.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Genesis 1:1–5

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Richard Boyce

The writer most likely imagined this creative work of God during the days of Babylonian exile, when all the earlier order of Israel’s worship in Jerusalem had been brought to naught. This creation story is a way of holding onto hope when all signs of order have been destroyed. Set in this context, this story can only be heard as the first in a long series of stories about God creating order out of chaos: at the beginning of ordered time, through the waters of the Red Sea, in the muddy waters of the river Jordan, and down to the chaotic situation of God’s people today.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Joseph L. Price

During this season of celebrating the manifestation of God in Christ, the creation story can be examined to learn about its testimony to the initial manifestation of God. It introduces ideas about the character of God and purpose of creation. Each act or element of creation is generated by God’s word. Consequently God is understood as an active God, as the source of history. The opening text in Genesis affirms the character of God, rather than providing a historical account or a scientific proposition about creation. The text is an affirmation that all of life, all aspects of order, and all possibilities within reality are dependent upon the creative act of God.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Donna Schaper

“In the beginning, God.” That is the whole story in a nutshell. The first thing that happened to the formless earth is this: the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. When Jesus is later baptized, he has a significant connection back to the deep waters of creation. He goes from being without form to being someone with form. He goes back to the original. He has a heaven-opening event. He does what God did in the beginning: He reopens the world.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Lawrence Wood

These opening verses are not mere stage setting. They are the story proper—a story of God’s activity. The main actor is here. All the scenes to come will proceed from this action. The beginning is all water: watery deeps, dark and formless. At baptism we are asked to submit to the primordial waters and a figurative death. God’s creative power is made powerfully personal in this second birth. This first Sunday after Epiphany comes at the start of the new year, an evocative time to talk about beginnings. It lends itself to remembrance of baptism and the beginning of Christian life.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:1–5

Focus on Your Teaching

Tweens may be thinking about new beginnings this week. Some will have made New Year's resolutions they may be struggling to keep. Others have just returned or will soon be returning to school after a holiday break, and may hope the new school term can be a fresh start. Today's session points tweens toward the One who is with us through all our beginnings, endings, and in-betweens. Engage your learners' creative instincts to help them experience God as Creator, not only of all things "in the beginning," but also of new beginnings, especially through Jesus Christ.

*Creating God, inspire me to ever greater creativity as these young people
and I celebrate the new life you give in Jesus. Amen.*

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ Color Pack 10, 12, 13, 30
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1 from December 31, materials listed there
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ building materials (see Gathering)
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ video camera (optional)
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player
- ☐ water, bowls
- ☐ mural paper, markers or oil crayons

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: Resource Sheet 2, materials listed
- ☐ option 2: cupcakes; frosting; cake-decorating supplies; Color Pack 5, 6
- ☐ option 3: computer, Internet access, paper, pencils

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, gather an eclectic assortment of "building materials," such as rubber bands, small blocks, toothpicks, packing peanuts, string, and clay. Be sure to have enough for all learners to build something.

As learners arrive, greet them by name. Spend a few minutes visiting with tweens and talking about the best things and the worst things that happened to them during the first week of 2024.

Lead the opening ritual as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. This week's "Star Stuff" trivia question is:

The "stellar nurseries" of space—the areas from which stars are formed—are known as:

- a. pulsars
- b. black holes
- c. nebulae (*correct answer*)
- d. Van Allen belts

Display Color Pack 13, reading aloud the caption. Ask: How might the Pillars of Creation remind us of Jesus? Affirm thoughtful responses. Pray aloud:

God Most High, in the beginning you kindled light from darkness through your Word. Shine your glory into our hearts today, as we learn more about Jesus, your Word made flesh. Amen.

Sing "We Are Dancing in the Love of God" (Color Pack 30; track 23 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

EXPLORING

Form pairs and distribute the building materials you have gathered. Ask: What can you make out of this stuff? Give pairs three minutes to make the best creation they can and give it a title. When time is called, have each pair present its creation to the group.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (A Dramatic Reading: Genesis 1:1–5). Recruit volunteers to operate the light switches or window shades, to operate the CD player, to fill containers with water, and to play the Storyteller. Option: Make an audio or video recording of the drama to share with others.

Because evening preceded morning on the first day (Genesis 1:5), the Hebrew calendar observes the beginning of the day as sunset, not sunrise. For the Sabbath and some Holy Days, day begins when three stars are seen.

After the reading, ask tweens to turn in their Bibles to Genesis 1:1–5. Point out that Genesis 1:2 describes the earth prior to God’s creative activity as “a formless void.” This verse tells us God brought order to this chaos, giving it a new, light- and life-filled beginning. Ask:

- ✧ How is our power to create like God’s power to create? How is it different?
- ✧ What does God’s power over chaos “in the beginning” suggest about God’s power over chaos in our world and in our lives today?

Point out that today’s reading from Genesis 1 is just the first part of a long Hebrew poem about creation—although edited and arranged as prose in most modern English Bibles—that extends through Genesis 2:4a. Unroll a sheet of mural paper and set “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands” (track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024) to repeat play while groups work. Form six working teams of at least two learners each. (If your group is small, form pairs and assign more than one day to each pair.) Assign each team one day of creation to read about and illustrate on the mural, using markers or oil crayons. Have teams include words of thanks and praise for each day:

Day 1: Genesis 1:1–5	Night and day
Day 2: Genesis 1:6–8	Sky
Day 3: Genesis 1:9–13	Land and seas; vegetation
Day 4: Genesis 1:14–19	Sun, moon, stars
Day 5: Genesis 1:20–23	Sea creatures; birds
Day 6: Genesis 1:24–31	Wild animals; human beings
Day 7: Genesis 2:1–4a	God rests

Arrange to display the completed mural for the whole congregation.

Tell tweens that, in many congregations (perhaps including your own), today commemorates Jesus’ baptism. Read aloud Mark 1:9–11. Ask:

- ✧ What connections can you make between the story of creation and the story of Jesus’ baptism? (Consider the presence of water, the Spirit’s activity, and the voice of God.)
- ✧ How does baptism mark a new beginning? (Tell about your church’s understanding of baptism, as is helpful.)
- ✧ In what ways do Christians praise God for creation?

Although Genesis 1 doesn’t explicitly teach it, the classic Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, “out of nothing,” does have biblical support. Invite interested tweens to check out Colossians 1:15–17, Ephesians 3:9, Hebrews 11:3, and Revelation 4:11.

EASY
PREP

We Are Dancing in the Love of God

We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing in the love
of God,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.
We are dancing, we are
dancing, ooh,
We are dancing in the love
of God.

Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos',
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos',
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba,
ooh,
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.
Siyahamba, siyahamba,
ooh,
Siyahamba ekukhanyen'
kwenkhos'.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

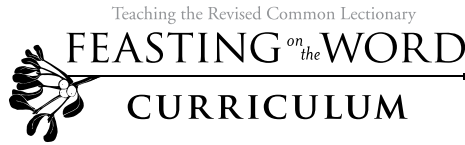
- Paper Doves** Point out that the Hebrew word for “wind” in Genesis 1:2 can also be translated as “breath” and “spirit.” The dove is a traditional symbol for God’s Spirit, perhaps because of the reference in Mark 1:10. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Spirit, like a Dove). Invite learners to fold paper birds as visible reminders of the power of the Holy Spirit to create new beginnings. Have learners write brief prayers for new beginnings on the birds and set them aside to use in Closing.
- That Takes the Cake** To explore the theme of new beginnings in creation, Jesus’ baptism, and your baptisms, enjoy cupcakes and celebrate Christians’ spiritual birthday! Buy or bake enough undecorated cupcakes for each learner to have at least one. After washing hands, invite learners to frost and decorate their cupcakes with symbols of baptism, such as those on Color Pack 5 and 6. As you work, talk together about how Christian baptism unites us to Jesus, making us God’s beloved children (see Mark 1:11; John 1:12–13). Christian baptism marks being born again, from above, “of water and Spirit” (John 3:5). Once the cupcakes are decorated, exchange them with one another, saying, “Remember your baptism, and be thankful!” Offer extra cupcakes to other people in the congregation with the same greeting.
- Tell It Again** The story of creation has been celebrated by many authors and artists. Read aloud or listen to a recording of the poem “The Creation” by James Weldon Johnson. (It can be found on several Web sites, including poets.org/poem/creation and bit.ly/JohnsonCreation.) Discuss how Johnson praises God as the Creator of new beginnings. Form pairs and have tweens retell or rewrite the creation story in their own words, including words of praise to God. Take time for each pair to present their work to the whole group.

CLOSING

Gather the group and introduce this session’s “Star of the Week”: the eight-pointed Star of Regeneration. Cut the pattern for the Star of Regeneration from Color Pack 12 and have learners trace it to make their stars, as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. As they work, explain: The book of Titus in the New Testament teaches that God saved us “through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. . . . poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ” (Titus 3:5–6). Some early Christians spoke of Jesus’ resurrection as “the eighth day of creation,” because it marks the beginning of God’s new creation. The apostle Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The eight-pointed star symbolizes this new beginning.

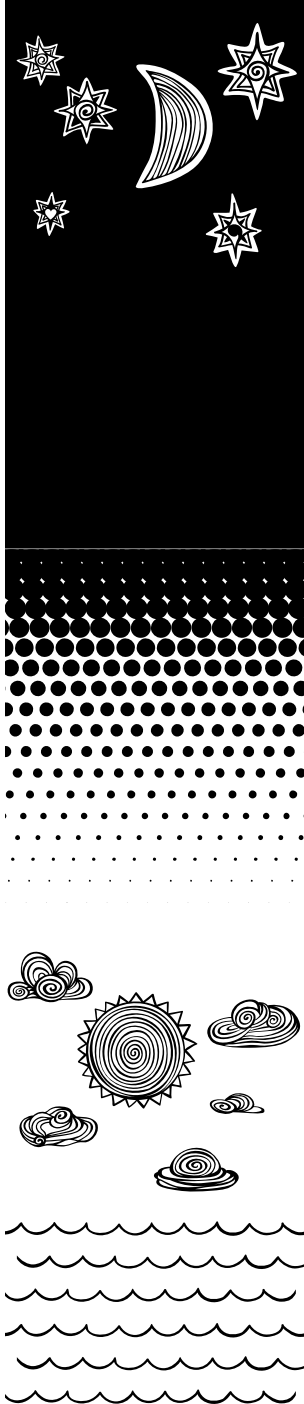
Lead the closing ritual as described on Resource Sheet 1 from December 31. If you did option 1 in Responding, ask each learner to take a dove and offer the prayer that is written on it. Extend signs and words of peace to one another as you depart.

January 7, 2024
In the Beginning



Tweens
Resource Sheet 1

A Dramatic Reading (Genesis 1:1–5)



Make the room as dark as possible. Play “Music for Meditation” (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024) softly in the background throughout the reading, repeating it as needed.

(All Voices, except the Storyteller, whisper the words “In the beginning” repeatedly as the Storyteller begins to speak:)

Storyteller: In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth,
the earth was a formless void.

(All Voices repeat the word “void,” decreasing in volume with each repetition, as if echoing in an infinitely large chasm.)

Storyteller: and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God . . .

(All Voices begin to make the sound of a blowing wind, gradually gathering in strength.)

Storyteller: swept over the face of the waters.

(Splash and slosh containers of water.)

Storyteller: Then God said:

All Voices (loudly): Let there be light!

(Turn on the room lights.)

Storyteller: God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

All Voices (loudly): The light was good!

Storyteller: God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

The Spirit, like a Dove

You Will Need

- ☐ 1 piece of white card stock
- ☐ 1 piece of 8½" x 11" white paper
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ pencil
- ☐ markers or glitter paint pens
- ☐ glue stick
- ☐ hole punch
- ☐ string

1. Cut out the pattern for the dove's body and trace it onto white card stock—or draw your own dove, using the pattern as a general guide.
2. Cut out the dove's body. Decorate it using markers or glitter paint pens.
3. Lay the sheet of white paper flat on the table. Fold over a piece 1/2 inch wide. Turn the paper over and make another half-inch fold. Repeat the turning and folding until the paper is completely folded and resembles a fan.
4. Cut a slit in the dove's center. Slide the folded paper halfway through.
5. Bring the top edges of the folded paper together and glue them where they meet.
6. To hang the dove, punch a hole at the top of the wings and tie on a length of thread.

