



S2.Lesson 5: Language – Tower of Babel

Middle School Lesson Plans

Supplies Needed: Journals; Handout; tv or laptop to show movie clip (movie clip link is available at rfour.org/curriculum.html); easel and paper pad/whiteboard/chalkboard; writing utensils for each student; cards from the board game *Balderdash* (If you do not have *Balderdash*, you can use this website that lists 400 words rarely used or known in the English language: <http://phrontistery.info/clw1.html>). Take about 15 words and definitions and print the words out on a sheet of paper, then cut each word and definition onto its own slip and then you're all set!)

OPENING PRAYER

TELL

- We're going to watch a short clip from the movie, *Despicable Me*.
- Because we don't know his name, we'll call the "father," "Mr. Despicable."

WATCH Movie Clip from *Despicable Me*

ASK

- In order to get the prize, what did the characters have to do (knock over the target)
- After having hit the target with the tools provided, was it very likely that the target could be knocked over (no)
- So that's just a way to get people's money, right?
- What does Mr. Despicable do? (uses his own methods)
- What do you think of his actions?
- Is this story real? (no, of course not)
- But can we learn things from the clip (sure)
- Let's say we had to write a moral to this story. What do you think it might be? (write ideas on flip chart. An example to get the class going if they need it: The moral of this story is that two wrongs make a right).

DO Moral writing activity

TELL

- This is not a story that is part of the Israelites' history. You can tell this by how the story starts with "At one time..." That's the equivalent of us saying, "Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away" etc.
- Instead this story is more like a fable, or a fairy tale. It's sort of like the story of "how the leopard got his spots" but the story is about language and humans, not leopards and spots.
- Let's read it now.

READ Genesis 11:1-9 (from The Message)

1 At one time, the whole Earth spoke the same language. 2 It so happened that as they moved out of the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled down. 3 They said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and make them well." They used brick for stone and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches Heaven. Let's make ourselves famous so we won't be scattered here and there across the Earth." 5 God came down to look over the city and the tower those people had built. 6 God took one look and said, "If they all speak the same language, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. They'll stop at nothing! 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 Then once the people started to not understand each other, they argued and eventually they had to quit building the city and moved away from each other. 9 That's how it came to be called Babel, because there God turned their language into "babble" and the people scattered all over the world.

ASK

- In verse 4, what is the goal of the people? (to build a building, and a city and not be scattered)
- In verse 8, what is the end result (they stopped building the tower and were scattered across the earth)
- Why did they fail? (easy answer: God worked against them. More complex answer: The people used the tool of language in the wrong way to disastrous results)

TELL

- In verse 4, when they say, "let us make a building that will reach heaven" a helpful way to understand/interpret that line is to think of the people trying to reach God on their own terms. This is the equivalent of a baseball player not lifting weights or training for the big game, but instead takes steroids and pays the umpires to make all the calls in his favor. It's a shortcut. It's cheating. It's outside the design of game. And if everyone did it, then there'd be no game, right? It'd fall apart. Just like in the video clip that we watched. And that's what happens in this story. It falls apart.
- Because the story is written like a fairy tale, characteristics of God are not represented "correctly." Instead, God acts a lot like Mr. Despicable does. God isn't super-observant (just "happens" to stop by, and then notices something amiss), God is confused or fearful (What's happening? That's not right!) and God is reactionary (This must be stopped! Watch me fix this!).
- I tell you this because this story doesn't exist so much to help the Israelites understand God, instead, this story helps the Israelites understand the relationship between language, humans and God.
- After reading this story, what do you think this story tells us about language?
 - (Language is very powerful. If everyone spoke the same language, look at the things that could be accomplished!)
 - (When you do things that aren't centered on God, then the powerful tool of language doesn't just stop working, it works against you!)
- Fables often have the last line to a story that ends with, "The moral of this story is..."
- This story doesn't end that way, so let's write our own moral to this story. What do we think, as a class, is the moral to this story? (write ideas down on the flip chart)

DO “Moral to this story” Activity (again)

TELL

- When we understand and know what a word means, then that word has power.
- We're now going to play a game where we get to experience using words that we don't know.
- The name of this game is “Balderdash.”
- The way it works is that one person will read the word from the card and spell it for us. This person is the “reader.”
- We all write the word down.
- Then we write our own definition for it.
- While we are doing that, the Reader is writing the REAL definition on their piece of paper. Then all pieces of paper are turned in to the Reader.
- The Reader reads all definitions. Then we go around and each person chooses the definition they think is the right one.
- You get 1 point for every person who chooses your definition, and you get 2 points for choosing the right definition. If you choose your own definition, you do not get a point for that. The Reader gets 3 points if no one chooses the right definition. You also get 3 points for writing a definition that is exact or very close to the actual definition.

DO Balderdash Activity

TELL

- Can you imagine talking to someone who would be using these words?
- It'd be pretty frustrating wouldn't it?
- At least, it'd definitely take longer to figure anything out.
- And that's what happens when we use language without paying attention to God.
- Using words without God slows communication down, and sometimes, completely stops communication from happening.
- Next class, we'll discuss how we invite God into our speech. And we'll look at what happens when we do that.

CLOSING PRAYER