

# *Learning Cycles*

## **LET THERE BE LIGHT!**

**Cultivating Gratitude &  
Care for God's Creation**

Developed by Tracey E. Herzer



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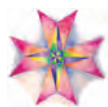
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# About LearningCycles

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## What is LearningCycles?

LearningCycles is an innovative approach to faith formation. It takes seriously the spiritual development of children while providing creative and exciting activities that engage children in a whole new level of learning and retention. The rotation-style model means that children work on the same story or concept for several weeks, using different learning approaches in each workshop room they visit.

### *Ideas for possible workshops:*

Art  
Storytelling  
Music  
Group Activities  
Cooking

Science Experiments  
Games  
Drama or Puppets  
Movies  
Geography or Map Excursions

## Easy to Adapt

You can use the activities in this resource for shorter learning center events, normal classroom use, intergenerational gatherings, and more. Adapt what you find here to best suit your faith formation situation.



# Recruiting LearningCycles Leaders

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*LearningCycles make it VERY easy to increase your number of volunteers, by dividing jobs into manageable parts. Here are some ways that parishioners of ALL ages can be involved:*

**CYCLE LEADERS** sign up as part of a team of 2 or 3 adults who will teach one 4-6 week cycle. Teachers remain in the same workshop room each week of the cycle and teach the same lesson plan to different classes each week. Workshop rooms may use skills in areas as music, dance, cooking, quilting, gardening or painting, but you don't have to have a special skill in order to help. Teachers can sign up to help read stories, turn on computers, make popcorn, hand out art supplies, etc.

**SHEPHERDS** commit for the entire school year, but they never have to prepare or teach a lesson! Shepherds work in teams and travel with their class through each of the different workshops. Shepherds are the essential relationship part of this program, learning the children's names, providing continuity of leadership and being a friendly, safe presence in the classroom each week.

**CYCLE COORDINATORS** are needed for each different cycle. These people manage the details of a cycle, contacting all the volunteer teachers for that cycle, distributing the lesson plans, making sure supplies are purchased, etc.

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## **Some churches have also used:**

**DECORATING TEAM** A resourceful group of people is needed to create and plan new and evolving learning spaces. These folks might be interior designers, or they may be people who are just addicted to home improvement shows or have a knack for decorating inexpensively! Churches who share space or don't have the budget for large-scale renovations will need a group of creative thinkers to come up with props or posters that can be used on Sunday, but safely stored away during the week.

**RESOURCE TEAM** This "big picture" group can be comprised of all your cycle coordinators, as well as interested parents. Together the group handles trouble-shooting, long-range plans and communication to the entire church. For churches that already have a catechist or formation team, that committee can provide the functions of a Resource Team.



# General Class Structure

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- 1. OPENING ACTIVITY** (10-15 minutes, as children arrive)  
Welcome students and make sure everyone has a nametag. Opening activities give early arrivers something to start on immediately and provide a warm, busy room for children to enter. The activity could be simply drawing or decorating your nametag. It could also be coloring sheets or simple games. Check the “Filler Activities” of your lesson plan for ideas or ask your Cycle Coordinator.
- 2. INTRODUCTIONS** (approximately 10 minutes)
  - a. Introduce yourself:** Tell students about you – your family, how long you have been at this church, what kind of work you do, what your hobbies are, why you signed up to help teach, etc.
  - b. Introduce the cycle story or theme:** Ask children what they’ve been studying or have done in other rooms on other weeks. Talk about the basic theme or season (see the Overview p. 6 for some ideas). Read the story to children.
  - c. Introduce your activity:** Tell the children which part of the story your room is focusing on, and perhaps ask them to re-tell you that part of the story in their own words.
- 3. WORKSHOP ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION** (approximately 25-30 minutes)  
See attached lesson plans for specific instructions about the main activity. Supplies should be in your classroom, but if you need help, ask your cycle coordinator. If you run low on supplies, please tell your coordinator so they can plan accordingly.

If children finish early, you can use any of the “Filler Activities” provided in each lesson plan. In addition, you may use activity sheets (see “Suggested Resources for this Cycle”) as “quiet work” for the early finishers while they wait for everyone to complete the task.

Try to plan your time so that children finish the activity and still have a few minutes to process the class by journaling or drawing. Encourage them to take their work seriously, and try to foster a semi-quiet atmosphere that allows children to think about what they have heard, seen and experienced. Ask questions like “What did you learn today?” or “How did you feel while doing this activity?” Connect your activity back to the story. Studies show us that quiet reflection time is what helps move items from short-term memory into long-term memory so this piece is VERY important!

- 4. CLEAN UP** (approximately 5 minutes)  
Have children help clean up and make sure everyone has their papers, jackets, etc. If parents come to the classroom to pick up their children, this is a good time to praise children in front of their parents. This is also a good time to discuss any concerns or questions quietly with parents. Tell the children goodbye. Thank them for coming.





# Theological Overview of this Cycle

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The creation story is one that most children in most religions all over the world are familiar with in some way. There are multiple ways to tell the story and multiple ways to hear it, but any way you look at it, this is THE foundational story of humankind and the world we live in. It is important that children learn the story, but it is equally important that we find ways to encourage them to imagine and wonder.

Repetition will help children learn the basics of the story. Remember that the same story should be told each week of the cycle so that children will hear the story several times. Encourage children to join in on the repeated phrases of the story (for example – “and there was evening, and there was morning, the \_\_\_\_ day” or “And God said it was good”).

Be prepared for all kinds of unconventional questions about creation! When we did this cycle at my church, I had a panic-stricken teacher drag me into her classroom to answer an 8-year-old’s burning question, “What about the dinosaurs??” My answer to them was my standard one, “Hmmm... that is a very good question. What do YOU think?”

After I listened to their creative and entertaining answers, I reminded them that this story was one way of thinking about all the wonderful things that God created, but not every single thing is mentioned in the story. Dinosaurs could easily fall into the categories of “great sea monsters” (Gen 1:21) or “living creatures of every kind” (vs. 24) and they all seemed satisfied with that. Remember that children like to wonder and hypothesize and often the questions are much more important to them than the actual answers.

In any case, the point of this cycle is not to debate creation vs. evolution or how we feel about the literal interpretation of scripture... the point is to teach children that we live in a magnificent, intricate world brought into existence by a loving Creator who has now given human beings the responsibility to care for this wonderful creation.

This cycle offers a great opportunity to introduce concepts of recycling and care for the earth. If you have ministries within your church or groups within your community who focus on environmental issues, try to get them involved too! There are many wonderful resources for teaching earth stewardship and ecology. Check out some of the website resource lists we found – they are listed in “Suggested Resources” on page 9.

We used this unit starting on Epiphany (after Christmas) and since LIGHT is one of the main themes of Epiphany, it was an easy and interesting twist to a very familiar story.

Happy Creating!  
Tracey E. Herzer

*PS – We offer a BONUS cycle this time – a gardening one! Remember that you don’t have to use all cycles or you can combine cycles if that’s easier. Do what works for your parish!*



# Letter to the Parents for this Cycle

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*(We suggest you mail this letter to all parents with a copy of the cycle story, plus the Theological Overview)*

Dear Parents,

During this unit, we will be studying the story of Creation. Stories of creation are found in every religion, every tribe, every culture under the sun. It is THE foundational story for all human beings. We study this important story because the creation story truly is our story... in it we live and breathe and have our being.

The story of Creation or origin of the Universe for the Christian (and also Jewish) community can be found in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament of the Bible) in the Book of Genesis, chapters one and two. The word “genesis” means “beginning”: Genesis is the name of the first book of the Bible and it includes the story of the beginning of the world. Our memory verse for this cycle comes from the very first words in the Bible: **“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)**

Children will learn about the days of Creation and what was created on each day. Our hope is that by the end of the unit, your children will be able to see the world around them as an intricate, amazing gift given by a loving Creator. We also want them to see that we have a role to play: we are co-workers with God as we care for and help restore God’s creation. We are called to care for the earth and practice Stewardship of Creation.

All these pieces are important, but for us, the most significant idea we want children to walk away from this unit with is that God is the source of all Life and that Life is good. All of Life, when it is created, is pronounced by God to be GOOD. Furthermore, when we are created, God pronounces us VERY GOOD. Life, in all its forms, is a gift from God – worthy to be celebrated and cared for.

Life was always created to be in relationship with God and with the rest of creation. Our hope is that students who experience this cycle will find that it not only increases their knowledge about God, but also deepens their relationship with God.

You can help us by reinforcing these ideas with your child at home. Talk about God’s creation and our responsibilities. Look for ways your entire family can practice good stewardship of the earth – planting flowers, recycling, finding new uses for old items, etc.

It’s true that YOU are your child’s primary teacher, mentor & Christian formation expert, but we are here to help you in whatever ways we are able by offering some tips and some structure. Furthermore, the God of all Creation will be with you and your child as you travel through this experience... so listen for the whispers of your Creator!

Enjoy the Journey!  
Tracey E. Herzer





# Story for Cycle: Let there be Light!

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*To be read each week of the cycle*

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.  
Everything was empty and dark, but God was there.

Then God said, "Let there be Light!" And there was.  
The light was called Day.  
The dark was called Night.  
And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.  
And God saw that it was good.

God made the sky on the second day.  
A space so big and so deep for all the world to share  
And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.  
And God saw that it was good.

On the third day, God separated the waters from the land.  
The waters became rivers and oceans, brooks and streams, and puddles to splash in.  
The land became mountain tops to climb and beaches to rest on.  
God gave us trees and plants and flowers for us to enjoy  
And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.  
And God saw that it was good.

God made special lights for the sky on the fourth day.  
The bright sun would watch over us during the day,  
And the gentle moon and sparkling stars would watch at night.  
And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.  
And God saw that it was good.

On the fifth day, God filled the water with all kinds of underwater creatures.  
Then God created birds with feathers of every color to fly in the sky and sing their songs.  
And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.  
And God saw that it was good.

God made all the rest of the animals on the sixth day:  
Lions and zebras and chickens and spiders and cats and dogs and iguanas and all the rest.  
Then God said, "Let us make humans who will be like us in some ways."  
And so God made humans.  
And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.  
And this time God saw that it was VERY good.

And on the seventh day God rested.

*Stories retold by Tracey Herzer*



# Suggested Resources

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## VIDEOS

The video we recommend for this cycle is **“God’s Trombones”** a collection of 3 poems by James Weldon Johnson and produced by Billy Budd films (1994). The video features three sections: Creation, The Prodigal Son, and Go Down, Death. We will be using the first piece “Creation”, narrated by the wonderful rumbling voice of James Earl Jones and animated with clay figures (claymation). The piece is about 9 minutes long and should be appropriate for most elementary school children K-5<sup>th</sup> Grade, although teens and adults will probably love it too! You can order this video from Amazon here at <https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Trombones-James-Earl-Jones/dp/B0007GP7LY>

Another good video is **The Creation** from Rabbit Ears, with Christian music artist Amy Grant reading the story while still shots of the illustrations are shown. This can be purchased on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.com/Rabbit-Ears-Beloved-Bible-Stories/dp/0739337092>.

You could also use shorter videos that are free and accessible online, for example this video portrayal of Creation from Saddleback Kids, <https://youtu.be/uaTICoviQKA>

## FURTHER RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN ON CARE FOR CREATION

If your parish is looking for further children's formation resources on care for Creation and environmental protection, stewardship, and justice, we recommend our Creation Care Kids resources, including our EarthKeepers Vacation Bible School program. For more information, see: <https://pastoral.center/on-care-kids>



# Activities Overview for This Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Paint Recycling Cans	Caring for Creation
PUBLISHING	Creating Sabbath Mobiles	The Creation & Celebration of the Sabbath
DRAMA	Photo Scavenger Hunt & Collage	Examples of Creation
MOVIE	The Creation Story	Relationship between a Creator & their creation
STORY	Hearing various Creation stories	Celebrating Creation
KITCHEN	Creation Snack Mix	Learning what was created each day
MUSIC	Singing Creation songs	World of Creation
GARDEN *** BONUS ***	Planting Paperwhites or other bulbs	Caring for Creation



# Let there Be Light: Drama Workshop

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## **Bible Reference for the Cycle:**

Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2

## **Main Verse for the Cycle:**

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”

Genesis 1:1  
*(King James Version of the Bible)*

## **Key Concepts and Life Application:**

- God is the source of Life. God created the heavens and earth – and it was good
- God created you – and it was VERY good
- God loves all of creation, and because we are made in the image of God and because God set us as stewards over creation, we are to love creation as God loves it.

## **Summary of Class Plans:**

Children will go on a photo scavenger hunt and then create a collage of pictures, depicting different aspects of creation.

## **Materials Needed:**

- A means for taking photos and printing them out. A digital camera or smart phone will work, if you can easily transfer and print the photos during the session. Instant cameras (digital or old-style Poloroid with film) would be easier. Having 2 or 3 cameras available would be ideal because you could split the class into teams.
- Poster board – one sheet for each team (and some extras for mistakes)
- Markers or Crayons
- Scissors
- If you can't find cameras, you'll need brown paper bags for children to collect items from outside.

## **Workshop Lesson Plans:**

- You can refer to “A General Schedule for Class Structure” (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- After reading the story to the children, talk to children about what things might have looked like early in each day and how things would have looked at the end of each day. See if they can remember which things were created on which days.
- Tell the children they will be going on a special Creation Walk where they will be finding examples of all the things God created. Children should take pictures or pick up objects to put in their bags. Give children a set time frame (probably not more than about 15 minutes) and remind them to find something from each day of Creation. Encourage them to be creative!



- When you gather back in the classroom, share what everyone found. Let children share stories about funny things that happened or how they came up with the picture they took or an item they gathered (for example – someone pretending to sleep on the bench for the 7<sup>th</sup> Day)
- If time permits, have children work in teams to create Creation posters, illustrating what God created each day. You may want to use a common theme for the titles such as “And God said, IT WAS GOOD!” or separate them by the day of creation or just let each team come up with their own ideas.

**Filler Activities:**

- Nature prints – This is another good option if you don’t have cameras. You will need sun-sensitive paper, which is available at many art supply stores or online (Amazon has a number of options, just search "sun-sensitive paper"). With this special paper, you just collect items such as a leaf, a feather, a rock, a flower, etc. and lay them on the paper while the sun is shining. After a few minutes, the sun turns the paper dark blue, leaving the shape of the items in white. Children love this!
- Paper Bag Match-Up – Take 7 paper bags and mark each one with a number 1-7. Have children either draw pictures or cut pictures out of magazines to illustrate each day. If time permits, dump out the contents of each bag (one day at a time) and ask children to explain some of the items they chose.



# Let there Be Light: Garden Workshop

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## Bible Reference for the Cycle:

Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2

## Main Verse for the Cycle:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”

Genesis 1:1  
*(King James Version of the Bible)*

## Key Concepts and Life Application:

- God is the source of Life. God created the heavens and earth – and it was good
- God created you – and it was VERY good
- God loves all of creation, and because we are made in the image of God and because God set us as stewards over creation, we are to love it as God loves it.

## Summary of Class Plans:

Children will plant bulbs or seeds and decorate pots, and discuss the beauty of God’s creation and our responsibility to care for it.

## Materials Needed:

- Flowers – either real or silk, a jumble of colors and types
- A tablecloth or newspapers or something to cover the flowers
- Scissors for cutting flowers
- One vase for each class
- Narcissus (or other kinds of bulbs or seeds)
- Dirt
- Clay pot
- Glue
- Markers / crayons
- Ribbons
- Plastic “jewels” or sequins

## Workshop Lesson Plans

- **BEFORE CLASS** – take the flowers out of their wrappings or whatever and place them in a somewhat jumbled “heap” on a table, with stems going different directions, etc. and then cover the flowers with a tablecloth or something.
- You can refer to “A General Schedule for Class Structure” (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- After you read the creation story, go back over the first part. Read Genesis 1:1-2 again and talk about the “chaos” and the “face of the deep” that existed before God created anything. Ask children what that chaos might have looked like and listen to their ideas of chaos.





- Show the children the covered pile and ask them what might be under there. Take a few guesses and then pull the cover off to reveal the flowers. Tell children this is the “chaos” of flowers, but together we are going to create something beautiful. Everyone has to be careful and work together politely because flowers are fragile
- Help the children arrange the flowers into a vase. Check with your flower guild or local florist for some general arranging tips, or even look online. But remember, this isn't a flower arranging class and it doesn't have to be perfect to be holy!
- After class, the flowers can be given or taken to someone who is at home or needs cheering up. Check with clergy about communion visits to homebound parishioners.
- The next project is for children to take home. Children will decorate their pots and then plant bulbs in them. We used narcissus bulbs because we did this cycle in January and they were plentiful at that time, as well as an easy plant to “force” into blooming, so children saw results very quickly. Talk with someone in your parish or at a local plant shop/nursery if you need help finding appropriate choices.
- Before the bulbs (or seeds or whatever) are planted, have children decorate their pots using ribbons, markers, or other decorations. Talk about the beauty of creation that we see all around us. Some children may choose to illustrate their favorite season or scene on their pot
- Plant the bulbs or seeds carefully, making sure to have enough adult supervision for younger children.
- Have children help you clean up the room, sweep any dirt that has spilled on the floor, etc. before they leave.

### Filler Activities

- Card Creation – have children make cards out of construction paper that could be delivered along with the flowers. If you keep messages generic like “We're thinking of you”, “God loves you” or “Made for you with love from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class at All Saints' Church” the cards can be stored and used for many different situations
- Creation pictictionary – have children take turns drawing something in creation on a board or piece of paper. Whoever is the first to correctly guess what is being drawn gets to be the next one to draw!

