

THE DANCING SUN

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THE DANCING SUN



Balancing the Cultural Heritage

  
Annette Loutit '93 ©

A children's resource for vacation church school, church and midweek groups

Volume III, 1993

"I remember my father telling me about the sun. When you watch it carefully, you see that it seems to pause and dance on the horizon just before it rises, bringing dawn to the sky and beginning a new day."

Raymond Eaglestick



The dancing sun as described by Raymond Eaglestick relates to a time of day sacred to all Aboriginal peoples and affirms a different way of seeing—a relatedness to all of creation which is integral to Aboriginal life.

In Aboriginal traditions "The Dancing Sun" is a symbol of resurrection, of new life. Therefore, we have chosen this title to represent the development of this new resource from within the community.

Cover art, "Balancing the cultural heritage," was illustrated by Annette Loutit, 1993.



seeds & sowers



The Dancing Sun is a joint publication of First Nations Ecumenical Liturgical Resources, History and Publications Board and the Division of Mission in Canada—Seeds & Sowers.

## Editorial

In early spring when the warmth of the sun was coaxing trees into blossom, an ecumenical group gathered to develop culturally appropriate materials for use in reserve and inner city communities. Participants included: Esaias Beardy, Community Development Worker from Garden Hill, Manitoba; Phyllis Keeper, an Anglican priest serving in inner city Winnipeg; Melody McKeller, student/leader at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre, serving a United Church in Saskatchewan; Betty Lou Skogen, student/leader at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre, leader in pastoral care with children, as well as a leader in abuse counselling; Patrick Lee, Anglican priest and administrator recently returned from Uganda; Annette Loutit, artist and student/leader at the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre. Jean Olthuis, Editor of *Seeds & Sowers*, assisted planning and development.

This resource responds to an urgent need for materials; but more, it carries forward a vision of working in community to affirm integrations of biblical story and Aboriginal culture. It was exciting for Jean and me to work with the group. Together, we considered assisting children to connect the meaning of biblical stories with Aboriginal cultural traditions to make a new story in their lives today. A part of our excitement is that we believe the resource will be important not only for Aboriginal children, but for persons in a variety of cross-cultural situations. Respect for the gifts of all peoples is an important Aboriginal value.

Aboriginal elders have historically viewed biblical truths through their own cultural tradition. These integrations have been shared within their own communities, but have not been widely known or affirmed. The profound understanding of the "goodness" of creation is a gift to all people. The laughter of Sarah and the faith of Abraham responding to God's call is deeply felt within Aboriginal tradition, an oral tradition which has a natural affinity with Hebraic tradition. The struggle of Moses, rooted in a Hebrew tradition and raised in Egyptian culture, has parallels within the Aboriginal community as well as in Canadian society where persons of many cultures attempt to live cross-cultural lives with integrity.

The stories offer an holistic approach to life, an understanding of the rhythms of seasons, cycles of life and our relationship to the Creator and all "creatures." We studied biblical story and reached into ancient Aboriginal traditions to make new stories as the trees burst into leaf and blossom. Fresh new leaves of the season are nourished always by roots anchored in the earth, responding to warmth and light as they send out new growth.

May we affirm the gifts of the Creator, respect and honour all creation as we work together to build a new story rooted in the old, but with its own special new growth committed to justice and peace for all.

Joyce Carlson  
Editor



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## Guidelines for the use of material

Our *purpose* in the development of the material was to affirm the spirituality of each child. We each come to the world with questions: who am I? Who am I in the world? Who is God? Is there *any* meaning and hope in life?

How we welcome the children, model community, interact with them and with other team leaders will give strong messages about Christian community, about caring for the world we live in and caring about one another.

Our hopes in developing this resource were:

1. To nurture and celebrate children's spirituality by helping them encounter God's love through the biblical story, Aboriginal teachings and their own stories.
2. To help children feel valued and respected for the persons they are.
3. To help children learn to respect creation and to understand and respect one another.
4. To enable children to experience that they *belong* to a community.
5. To celebrate and have fun.

To achieve these hopes, we developed the material using the following four steps:

1. We encountered the story.
2. We responded to the story, named and added our own experience.
3. We made and shared a new story.
4. We decided on some new action.

Children feel comfortable with a certain amount of freedom within a predictable structure. Our suggested structure includes "checking in" time, community building time, circle story time, quiet times and activity times that assist children to interact with the story. We encourage imaginative activity and lots of outdoor play time, e.g. the theme of "creation" lends itself to an exploration of the natural world. Encourage children to bring a quiet game or book from home for "quiet time." Have on hand crayons, pencil crayons, coloured paper, clay, construction

materials as well as books. This will give them opportunity to explore new materials and assist them should their family not have books or games for them to bring. Esaias Beardy suggested observing children's choices of books or play materials which might give clues about the child.

It may be helpful to have a special place for each child to store books or games brought from home as well as their creations each day. This may be a cubicle, a shoe box, or a plastic or paper bag with their name on it.

For vacation church school, we suggest a snack break mid-morning and a juice break mid-afternoon to meet children's normal needs. Be aware of nutritional needs of the children. If you are in doubt about any of the children receiving food before coming in the morning, your vacation school team may wish to provide a before-school snack.

Circle sharing is an important way of learning within Aboriginal communities. Consider these materials an extension of the circle and adapt them for your own use. We offer guidelines from community leaders:

1. Remember to listen, have patience and respect one another. There are differences between Aboriginal stories shared informally in a circle and the larger church where writing is more usual. Because Aboriginal traditions are not usually written, people have sometimes believed their own traditions aren't important. Affirm the traditions. As you share, people will have a glimpse of the underlying traditions and spirituality. Have them seek to find their own "grandparents," "elders" who can assist them in looking into traditions in their own communities. These teachings help them to understand the Creator. It is important that children understand the teachings such as the interrelatedness of the body, mind and spirit. There is majesty and sacredness in teachings from communities. Help people to see this.

*Elder Gladys Gook*

2. When you are dealing with children, they sometimes don't have a lot of confidence. Ask for

their opinions and ideas. They will have ideas about God, about the world they live in. Start with their own ideas and build their confidence. Don't worry about fancy materials. Pencils and paper for drawings are all you need. The relationship you have with them is most important.

*Rev. Phyllis Keeper*

3. Everybody comes. The circle is a circle of life. Everybody comes and has a place in the circle. We must always work toward that. It doesn't matter how small you think you are; everybody comes. Everyone is worth while.

*Rev. Evelyn Broadfoot*

The material was intentionally formed with a view to affirming Aboriginal understandings, affirming cross-cultural giftedness and the call to be justice-makers in the global community.

## How to use this resource

This resource is divided into five two-part sessions. They may be used as a five day vacation Bible school resource, for a five week summer session with one Sunday and one midweek activity each, or for 10 Sunday or midweek sessions. Specifically designed for use with children ages five to 13 years, it will be especially useful in communities with a high number of children of differing cultures, and in small rural communities with a cross-section of children from varying backgrounds.

Each session includes:

1. **A community gathering time**
2. **A circle story time**
3. **An interaction** to the story: this includes an activity and/or circle sharing time to give children opportunity to interact with the story and explore how it relates to their own lives.
4. **Snack breaks**

5. **An outside activity or learning** that affirms the story.

6. **A quiet time** to construct with paper, crayons and markers, or to read books.

7. **A second story time** This draws in a related story from Aboriginal tradition.

8. **Songs** Select music the children enjoy. We make some song suggestions in the sessions and encourage action songs where possible. A special song composed by one of our group is included (see p. 6).

9. **Prayers** Prayers may be used to open and close sessions. (We include prayers formed from our group.) You may use prayer time to encourage children to express their own feelings, guiding the development of their spirituality.

A daily schedule for vacation Bible school may be:

### Part 1

Morning

- |             |                                      |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 9:00– 9:30  | Community gathering                  |
| 9:30–10:30  | Circle story time                    |
| 10:30–10:50 | Snack break                          |
| 10:50–12:00 | Activity, outdoor walk or collecting |

### Part 2

Afternoon

- |            |                                      |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1:00– 1:30 | Community gathering; quiet time      |
| 1:30– 2:30 | Circle story time                    |
| 2:30– 2:50 | Snack break                          |
| 2:50– 3:50 | Activity, outdoor walk or collecting |
| 3:50– 4:00 | Closure, goodbyes                    |

## Resources

It would be helpful to have a child's story Bible such as Ralph Milton's *Living God's Way* (Wood Lake Books, 1993, \$16.95); and the children's music resource *All God's Children Sing* (Wood Lake Books, \$24.95) available for these sessions. Both resources are at the United Church and Anglican Church Book Rooms.

## Session One

### Faith focus:

*The creation belongs to the Creator. The Creator loves the creation. Everyone and everything in creation has value.*

### Bible story:

The creation story (Genesis 1)

### Introduction:

As we developed materials based on the biblical story of creation, we asked: what does this story tell us about the Creator and creation? What does this story tell us about how we must care for the Earth and one another? How does it fit with what we have been taught about the Earth and living with all the Earth's creatures?

We considered what we hoped children might experience from the creation story. We believed that the important points were: everything is *related*; there is no separation between God and creation. Everything and every one is *unique*/has *value* and is to be *respected*. The Creator has a *purpose* for everything the Creator created. Everything has *value* and should be used with respect. We are meant to live in *harmony* with the whole creation. We should have respect for one another's stories and for different points of view contained in stories.

Through the presentation of the creation story, we celebrate God's goodness. God set in motion a creative process. When we misuse creation, we interrupt harmony. It is God's intention that we live in harmony with all races. Others have feelings just as we do, and we are to respect animals and plants by using everything and not wasting.

### Preparation:

Prepare and display a large poster board with the "Faith focus" of the day written in large print.

### Materials

- art materials for hats and masks
- nature pictures or objects for nature table
- markers

## Part 1

### Community gathering:

Have available paper, pencils, crayons and markers on a low table. Welcome each child as s/he arrives and guide them to the table. Younger children may wish to make a picture of themselves with their name on it and share one thing s/he likes to do as they share their pictures. Have older children nine to 12 make a name tag and decorate it. Form a circle and have children talk about their names and pictures. Where do their names come from? Is the child named after someone? Why is the child named the way s/he is?

After each child has had an opportunity to share, pin the name tag on each child with a safety pin or thread with long string or brightly coloured yarn and place around their necks.

Draw the children together with a favourite song or songs. Leaders may bring guitars, portable keyboards, or drums. Encourage children to bring their own instruments. Hymns #103 "Morning has broken", #40 "This is the day" or #36 "Teach me God to wonder" from *Songs for a Gospel People* may be helpful.

### Circle story time:

Read/tell the story of creation in Genesis 1. Invite the children to repeat the following refrain after each major creation:

And God saw that it was good.

Older children may take turns reading the separate parts. Younger children may wish to repeat only the refrain.

### Responding to the story:

Have crayons, pens, pencil crayons, paper, markers, scissors, felt tips and large sheets of construction paper ready. Invite each child to create his/her own hat/mask using strips of paper 50–60 cm. by 25 cm. Have them draw, paint or cut out and paste on the different parts of creation that are special to them. Then tape or glue the strip together at one end to make the hat/mask. For masks, cut out spaces for eyes, nose and mouth.

Now, dance the story. Form a circle, standing, with all the children wearing their different hats/masks. As the story is retold, children will dance into the circle as the different parts of creation on their hats/masks are named. You might play "creation" music if a cassette player is available. All will respond to the refrain "And God saw that it was good." Invite children to share the story of making their hats/masks.

### Snack break

#### Activity:

#### Nature excursion

Invite children to go outside to explore creation first hand. They may wish to collect rocks, twigs, cones, nutshells, pieces of wood, dried plants.



Suggest they take special care not to pick living things, but respect all parts of creation. Have them bring their collections to a collection table to keep for the afternoon story/sharing session. Leaders may wish to add pictures or natural objects that they have collected. If it is impossible to go on a nature excursion, have a nature tape available and prepare a nature table with pictures and objects as above.

### Lunch break:

If children go home for lunch, suggest that they bring something special to play with during the quiet time, or to share with others in the afternoon.

## Part 2

### Community gathering—quiet time:

Children may play with their own games or books, choose a book or game provided, or create art with pencils, paper and crayons. They may wish to work with the materials they collected, e.g. a paper plate collage, or find a quiet place to be by themselves.

### Circle story time:

Gather the children to begin the story-time by singing a song. An excellent song on the theme of creation would be "The Butterfly Song" from *All God's Children Sing*.

Have the children take turns sharing/telling what they found or discovered when they went outside exploring. Have them carefully touch, feel and observe their object. Let them imagine what the object is telling them (e.g. I am a stone. I am six billion years old; I have seen ....), or say a thank you to the object (e.g. Thank you sun for bringing us warmth. Thank you tree for being a home for birds and bees.). Everything has a place in creation and has value. Ask what is special about the things they have found? What is their place in creation? As part of the learning, encourage the children to respect one another and to respect one another's stories by listening to one another.

Dramatize the following song/poem offered by Betty Lou Skogan. Encourage the children to put actions to the different parts.

**“God looked around and what did God see?”**

1. God looked around and what did God see?  
Not Much!  
So God decided to make this a better place to be.  
The first break was the light and the dark.  
Then God split up the sky, the earth and the sea.  
Plants, fruit trees and seeds were all added to the scene.

**Chorus:**

*God looked around and what did God say?  
“It is good! It is good!  
I like what this place is beginning to be.”  
God looked around and what did God see?  
There was value, respect and harmony.  
So God said: “What can each new day bring?  
It can be good! It can be good!”*

2. God looked around and what did God see?  
A bit more!  
Let’s have an evening and then a morning.  
How about four seasons to make it work right?  
A sun for the day, and the stars for the night!  
Hey! this place is starting to look all right.
3. God looked around and what did God see?  
Good things!  
Sea monsters, birds and creepy crawly water life.  
The waters were alive and so was the land.  
Cattle, wild animals and creepy crawly land life.  
Life was popping up all over the land.
4. God looked around and what did God see?  
New life!  
So God created, in God’s own image—human beings.  
Someone to care for and look after—the fishes in the sea,  
The birds in the air, the cattle, the wild animals and the creepy crawly things.  
These humans would multiply and there would be abundant life in the land.

People believe different things about how the world came into being. In Aboriginal tradition, there were stories told of the beginning of time. Stan McKay Sr., a Native elder, tells a story from the Cree tradition of how the world came into being.

A main character of the story was Wisahkechahk. Wisahkechahk was described as human and yet he had certain superhuman abilities. One of the important characteristics of Wisahkechahk was that he could communicate with animals and birds.

Read (or preferably tell) the following story by Stan McKay Sr. You might involve the children in the story through creative movement as the story is told. Read the story slowly so children have time to express actions.

**M**any years ago there was a great flood. Wisahkechahk and all the animals were on a raft for a very long time. Different animals were sent down to see if they could reach the bottom to touch land. They could not reach the bottom.

Then, Wisahkechahk sent a musk-rat. The musk-rat went down and when he came up, he had a bit of mud in his paws. Wisahkechahk blew on the soil and it started to grow. There was so much land that it went as far as the eye could see.

Wisahkechahk sent another animal to see if the land was big enough for them. The animal came back and said it was not big enough; he would have to make more. So, Wisahkechahk blew on the soil again.

Then, he sent another and the animal came back again and said he would have to make more. Again he blew on the soil.

Finally, he sent an animal who said that he had gone as far as he could and still he could not see how far the land went and so it was big enough.

[Journey from Fisher River by Joyce Carlson. Used by permission of The United Church Publishing House.]

“MUSKRATS SUCCESS”



**Responding to the story:**

**Making a new creation story**

Have older children work in groups of two or three to make a picture or write a story or poem of what they believe most about creation; or make a new creation story. Give them a few lines to start their stories, e.g.:

Once there were no plants and no trees, no animals and no humans, no stars and no sun. There was nothing, and then....

Younger children might enjoy making pictures of their favourite part of the Wisahkechahk story. Help them print their stories in a few words under the pictures. Put all the stories into a book or combine into a mural. Invite someone to share the book/mural in sharing time.

Invite them to gather in the circle and share their responses. Ask: “What do the poems/pictures/stories tell us about the Creator? What is our place in creation? What does this tell us about caring for creation?”

End story time with a prayer, giving thanks for each child (name each child) and for drawings and stories.

**Snack break**

**Activity:**

You may wish to use this time to assist the children to display their art work or organize their collections. This may be a special opportunity to get to know some of the children individually. Remind children to bring something special from home if they have not done so. At the end of the time, collect their name tags and place their collections, art, books and games in a special place.

**Closure:**

End with goodbyes as the children leave.

Team leadership preparation for second Session: read Introduction to Session Two.

## Session Two

### Faith focus:

*We need to respect and live in harmony with self, others, the Creator and the whole creation.*

### Aboriginal teaching:

*The Vision of Four Winds* by Rev. Stan McKay

### Introduction:

Within the Aboriginal community, "caring for all creation" and "respect" for one another are strong cultural values. In the first session, we celebrated all of creation. This session affirms "respecting" others with a story by Rev. Stan McKay, Moderator of The United Church of Canada 1992–1994.

### Preparation:

Prepare a large poster with the "Faith focus" written in large print. Cut out four large circles from poster paper in bright yellow, red, black and white, to be used with *The Vision of Four Winds* teaching.

### Materials:

- paper plates and art materials
- music and drama props
- construction materials

## Part 1

### Community gathering:

Have pencil crayons, art supplies and cooperative games available for children as they arrive. Have them share thoughts on a happy or a sad experience they've had since they left or anything special they have brought. You may have to limit the sharing of special items to two or three children each day. Make sure every child has the opportunity to share during the five sessions. After sharing, sing a favourite song such as "The Spirit in me greets the Spirit in you" (#8 *All God's Children Sing*).

### Circle story time:

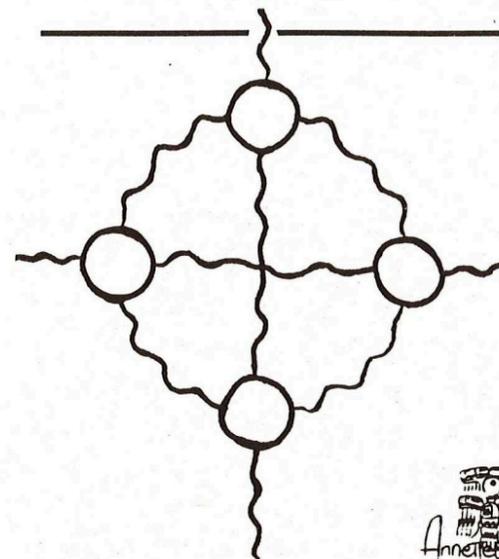
Tell the children we are now going to learn about the four directions as "symbols." To help children understand the word "symbol," use some of the items from the nature table. (e.g. What might a leaf be a symbol of? A feather? A shell? A seed? Items such as shells may symbolize the sea or a holiday. A seed may symbolize a plant or growth and new life.) Have them identify each of the four directions by placing the previously prepared circles on the wall, or having a child hold each circle in the appropriate direction. Leave the circles on the walls or place them visibly on the floor as you read (or tell) the following story by Stan McKay.

I am Aboriginal. I grew up in a small village in Manitoba and spoke Cree as a child. I heard many stories from elders that taught me about the natural world. I went to a small church in my community. Stories of my Aboriginal tradition were not considered important in church or in school.

It hurt me to think that the stories and teachings I loved were not valued. When I went to school and became a minister, I remembered the stories I was taught as a child. I understood that the Creator loves all of us. I also understood that the stories and teachings of my tradition were important and help us understand the Creator and all of creation.

Elders tell us it is important to value gifts and stories of all traditions. The teaching of four winds helps us to remember there are gifts from all peoples of the world. If we value the gifts of all peoples, we will bring unity and understanding to the world. The teaching is told in this way.

East is where the sun rises. Yellow, the colour of this direction is a symbol of life and reminds us that we are connected to everything in creation. East



represents the yellow-skinned people of the world and the season of spring. Each day of our life is a gift.

South is symbolized by the colour black and represents the dark-skinned people of the world. Warm summer winds come from the south. This is known as the direction of warmth and growth. Gifts of this direction are feelings that we have for one another.

West is represented by autumn, the glowing colours of fall and the red of the sunset. It reminds us of the passing of time and of our elders. This direction symbolizes Aboriginal peoples of the Earth. Gifts of this direction are rest, and understanding the sacredness of all creation.

North, the place of cool winds of winter, is symbolized by the colour white. The white blanket of snow reminds us of this direction. Each day, a gift of this direction is to live with understanding and strength. It represents the white-skinned people of the world.

Gifts represented by different peoples are also parts of ourselves. In our lives we move through the seasons of spring, summer, autumn and winter. We share the gifts given to us by the Creator. As we grow and change, we learn to accept the different parts of ourselves and one another.

The Creator loves the world, the whole world—all people, animals and plants. The teaching helps us accept ourselves and people of all races, rejoicing in the gifts of all.

### Responding to the story:

On the floor have a large circle outlined in masking tape divided into four quarters. Place the red, yellow, black and white circles, one in each quarter.

Some of us have a heritage from one circle, and some from another circle. Ask: "Which circle do you feel best represents your heritage? Do you feel you belong in the black, white, red or yellow circles? Are you in more than one circle?"

Have children write their names in the circles or on stickers to be placed in the circles according to their heritage or in any circle they wish. Invite them to add other stickers with their friends' names written on it.

Next try to include all children in all the circles.

To involve the children suggest that they:

"Think of a person you feel especially close to. Put your name in the yellow circle to celebrate the gift of life. Think of a feeling you shared with a member of your family or a friend. Put your name in the black circle. Think of an animal you feel especially close to. Put your name in the red circle to celebrate the sacredness of all life. If you are feeling full of energy today, put your name in the white circle to celebrate the gift of strength."

Close with the prayer. Have children face in each direction as the prayer is said. If you have not already done so, place circles in appropriate directions on the wall as the Prayer in Four Directions is said:

### Prayer in Four Directions

Creator,

We give thanks for the peoples of the East, who represent the gift of sunrise and new life each day.

Creator,

We give thanks for the peoples of the South representing warmth and growth.

Creator,

We give thanks for the peoples of the West who teach us that all creation is sacred.

Creator,

We give thanks for the peoples of the North who teach us to have strength each day.

(Adapted from teaching described in *Journey from Fisher River* by Joyce Carlson. Used by permission of The United Church Publishing House.)

*Note: Leave circles on the wall for the remainder of the sessions, as a visible reminder of The Four Winds teaching and to use in the closing session.*

### Snack break

#### Activity:

##### Cooperative games

Play a cooperative game which includes all. Show respect for children by inviting them to suggest games they would like to play.

Before closing, gather the children into a circle to affirm that each child is special, regardless of race or heritage and is part of the circle of life. Have each child say his/her name, e.g. "I am Mary," and dance into the circle as s/he says her name. The rest of the group responds by saying: "Yeah Mary!" or "Hurrah for Mary." Then the child dances out of the circle.

### Lunch break

## Part 2

#### Community gathering—quiet time:

Invite children to share their gifts or books with others. Once they choose a game, book, or art, they may spend quiet time in a place or space in the room (under a table, beside a window).

#### Story time:

This afternoon, we hear a story by Annette Loutit describing how she was treated as special by her grandmother. Read or tell the story by Annette.

When I was very young, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother. Her garden was my favourite place. She planted plants in certain ways. At the end of every row, she said a prayer. She prayed to the Creator because it was the Creator who made the plants grow. She explained that everything had a place, a reason for being created. There was a reason for bugs, a reason for birds. All parts of life were important and interrelated. She respected nature and taught me to listen to the owl calling, and the mourning dove. She sang songs. She burned sweetgrass. She used medicines. My grandmother also taught me about being a Christian.

I grew up in a mixed race community. In my family we were not encouraged to say we were part Native. I found it confusing. Other people looked at me and called me "a half-breed." I did not understand that my grandmother was doing things which were important parts of Native tradition. I only knew that she loved me—and I loved to be with her. My family was a large, busy family. My parents worked all the time to support us. They did this because they loved us. We also worked all the time and looked after brothers and sisters.

My grandmother's place was a very happy place. When I was there, I felt "special." I understand the importance of affirming all parts of my children's identity and helping them know they are special. I see this as a circle. If we take away part of the circle, the circle is not complete. It is out of balance. I am Native and I am white. I have to accept these different parts of my heritage and have them in balance. This balance is a part of me and it is part of all creation.

#### Responding to the story:

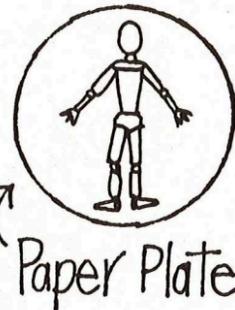
##### "I am special" circles

In Aboriginal tradition, children are gifts to be treated with care so they grow in love, respecting themselves and others. Older people, such as grandparents, have a special role in caring for children.

To help children identify who they are and their own special gifts, have them make an "I am spe-



cial" circle. Provide each child with a paper plate, or pre-cut construction paper circle. Invite children to make a picture of themselves in the centre of the circle. On the outer edge, have them make faces of person(s), perhaps grandparents, aunts, uncles or elders who help them feel loved. They may add symbols or pictures of things they especially enjoy doing, things that make them happy or unhappy, or things they wonder about in their family.



If they prefer, older children might divide the circle in half. On one half they may make a picture or list things they like about themselves; on the other half they may draw or list things they don't understand or would like to change about themselves.

Gather everyone in a circle. Ask: "Has anyone a story to share about a grandparent or someone who makes them feel special?" Talk about how special people can help us understand more about ourselves and our world as in Annette's story. Younger children may share one thing they enjoy doing, or one thing that makes them feel unhappy. Older children may talk about things they can or cannot change about themselves. Affirm that all are valuable and we must learn to accept and love all parts of ourselves.

End with an action song such as "Circle of Love," (#37 *All God's Children Sing*).

**Snack break**

**Activity:  
Celebrating gifts**

Annette Loutit uses her gift of seeing creation in a special way by doing art. Encourage children to express their gifts in some way. Use crayons, paint, construction materials, music and drama to encourage expression and creativity. You may begin by saying: "Sometimes it take a long time to discover our own gifts, but it is important to begin

to try. Sometimes we need to try many things, and never be ashamed of the things we make or do."

You might have corners of the room set up and labelled as Drama Corner (with dress-up clothes), Music Corner (with materials for simple musical instruments), Construction Corner (with materials for items such as bird houses), Art Corner (with paper, paint, crayons).

*Note: Face paints are often very interesting for children. Face paints may be purchased at specialty stores. Don't attempt to paint faces with regular paints.*

After children have drawn, painted or constructed, invite them to share their creations. Display work in a special place.

**Prayer:**

Creator, help us to:

- Remember that we belong to you.
- Remember to respect all faiths, all races.
- Remember that you are with us even when we have problems.
- Remember when we put to use our gifts, we are giving them back to you, our Creator.
- Remember you speak to different people in different ways
- and we are to respect the gifts of others.

**Closure:**

Following the prayer, children may wish to continue working quietly on their own creations or play games inside or outside until they are ready to leave. Use this as an opportunity to spend individual time with children, helping them to feel special. Say goodbye to each as they leave.

Preparation for Session Three: read Introduction.

## Session Three

**Faith focus:**

*The Creator is active and present in our lives. The Creator keeps coming into our lives through the creation and the love and care of other people.*

**Biblical story:**

Sarah and Abraham (Genesis 12: 1-9; 18: 1-15; 21: 1-6)

**Introduction:**

We have experienced God as Creator in our first session. In Session Two, we learned the Creator is in everything and everything has value. Today, we learn how the Creator kept coming into the lives of our biblical ancestors Abraham and Sarah.

Like the stories of Abraham and Sarah, stories of Aboriginal culture were passed down verbally by ancestors. These are called "oral stories." They are like stories written in books, but told by people who understood the sacredness of the stories and their importance to the community.

The story of Sarah and Abraham is a story of two people who trusted the Creator, left their home and went out into a new place. Abraham and Sarah didn't know where this would be. They had doubts. In the end there is joy in the story. They have a baby and they name him Isaac, meaning laughter.

**Preparation and Materials:**

- prepare play dough (recipe, p. 14)
- prepare names for treasure hunt (p.14)
- finger paints/art materials
- brown bags for puppets
- beading supplies

**Part 1**

**Community gathering:**

Have available art supplies and quiet games. Greet each child on arrival. Gather the children into a circle for "check in" time. If they have something special to share from home, invite them to share it with the whole group. Others may wish to share a significant experience they've had since Session Two.

To connect the children with the creation theme of the last session, begin story time by paraphrasing Psalm 104 (verses 1-24), praising the gifts of God. Have the children join in with a refrain after every fourth verse, raising their arms in a gesture of praise:

"I will sing to the Creator all my life."

*(You may wish to print the refrain on poster board.)*

**Circle story time:**

Show children a Bible and talk about its parts, the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian scriptures, e.g.:

"Our story today happened a long time ago and is from the Hebrew scriptures. For a long time, the Hebrew scriptures were 'oral stories' like the stories of Aboriginal tradition. Then people began to write them down."

Prepare to read or tell the story of Abraham and Sarah from Ralph Milton's *Living God's Way* (pp.26-27 and 30-31), or from a *Good News Bible* (Genesis 12, 13:14-18; 17-18:19; 21:1-7).

Tell the children to imagine they are living a long time ago and are at a gate of a very small city watching a large family prepare for a journey. Have them journey along with the family by making walking noises with their hands on their knees.

After you have finished telling the story, have the children return to the present. Invite their response. Ask: "What are your questions about the story? How did you feel about Sarah's and Abraham's travels? How do you think Abraham and Sarah felt or knew God was present in their lives? How do we know God is present in our lives today?"

### Responding to the story:

#### Making symbols or gifts

Provide modelling clay or play dough (recipe follows), as well as drawing paper. Have older children make symbols/pictures of how they know God is present in their lives. Younger children may make a model or draw a portrait of someone they love or feel especially close to. All children may wish to make gifts, a card or a paper placemat for someone they love. If your vacation school or group is near a hospital or an elderly person's home, you may take this as an opportunity to bring gifts the children have made to someone as a gift of love.

*(Arrange a special time when they may make their offering of their symbols or gifts to a hospital or elderly person's residence.)*

This might be an opportunity to have beading supplies for those who wish to make special gifts. An elder may be invited to teach them. If you have a variety of cultures represented, you may encourage the making of something special from the children's own cultural traditions.

Give each child the opportunity to share their symbol or drawing. Have a decorated table where they may keep them until they leave. Close with an action song like "We are dancing Sarah's circle" (repeat three times) sung to the tune of "We are climbing Jacob's ladder." Add verses such as "We are dancing higher, higher." End with "Children of our God."

#### Play dough recipe:

1 cup sugar, 1/2 cup salt, 1 cup water, 1 tbsp cooking oil, 2 tsp. cream of tartar.

Mix all together in a saucepan over a hot element. (This recipe makes enough for 4-6 symbols.)

### Snack/break

#### Activity:

Prepare a game such as a treasure hunt. You may wish to take the names of places from the biblical story of Sarah and Abraham and give clues at various points of how to find the way to the destination. There needs to be a treasure at the end of the journey. If you prefer to stay indoors, you might have a treasure hunt if there is space available. If this is not suitable, have them play cooperative games or continue with the theme of making a gift for someone they love.

### Lunch break

## Part 2

#### Community gathering—quiet time:

Take advantage of the opportunity to spend time individually and have children continue to work on their gifts or select an activity they wish to do/share.

#### Circle story time:

Tell or read the following story of "A girl who kept coming back" by Phyllis Keeper. Phyllis is a priest in a small church in inner city Winnipeg. She grew up in the small community of Muskrat Dam in northern Ontario. She has a special gift of helping people feel welcome.

After telling the story, ask the children: "Why do you think Lisa kept coming back to church? What might we have done to help Lisa know about God?"

I remember a girl around 12-years old who started coming to church with a little friend. She had noticed people coming into the building on Sundays, and so she came in. She kept coming back because she said, "I feel comfortable and the people are nice."

Her name was Lisa. She stayed as long as she could after the services. She had so many questions about church and about God. She was very sensitive. She understood many people were waiting to talk to me after services, so she asked short questions!

I was impressed by her questions. She asked questions like: "What is communion?" She really wanted to understand who God was, who she was and where she belonged.

I told her that communion reminds us that God loves us. I wanted her to understand that God is with us all the time, not just in communion, but all the time. I asked her to take the communion bread so she would feel included.

She was living with her mother. I tried to visit, but her mother wasn't home. Because I sensed Lisa was neglected, I couldn't use the model of loving parents to explain how God loved her. I told her she could pray to God, that no matter what happens in our lives, God is with us and will help us. I gave her a small bracelet at Christmas. I felt she understood what I was saying about God's love.

Lisa came every Sunday for many months and she asked more and more questions. She wanted to be confirmed. I arranged to have confirmation classes later in the year. One Sunday, I was speaking at another church. People told me she had been asking about me. She didn't come to church the next few Sundays. When I went to her home, someone said she had probably moved back to the reserve.

I believe God is very close to Lisa, wherever she is. I'll never forget her. I think about her often and pray for her.

### Responding to the story:

#### Sharing hands

To help younger children feel closer to one another, invite them to trace around each other's hands. Have them work in pairs using either crayons and/or finger paints to make imprints on the same piece of paper. Ask: "What things might we do to help one another feel close to God and to one another at home, at school, in his group?" (e.g. Work together to make pictures, share, do kind things.) Affirm that we give gifts to the Creator when we give gifts to others.

Older children might work in groups of two or three with the instruction to make large brown bag puppets of someone they love. Puppets may be made of paper bags decorated with scraps of cloth glued on. Invite participants to make a story about their puppet; then have the puppets tell a story. (e.g. "This is my grandmother. One day we were at my grandmother's house and....")

#### Show and tell

Invite sharing for those who feel comfortable. Encourage children to share times they have felt loved and times they have not felt loved. In Phyllis' story, there was a deep understanding that God loved the girl Lisa. Affirm experiences now of God, assisting each child in identifying his/her understanding of God.

#### Close with prayer:

Creator, We give thanks for each child here (*name*), for the people who love us and whom we love, and for the gifts which each child brings to our circle.

### Snack break

#### Activity:

Play some active outdoor games. If an indoor activity is necessary, invite the children to suggest some quiet activity that affirms cooperation and respect.

#### Closure:

Say goodbye as children leave.

Preparation for Session Four: read Introduction.

## Session Four

### Faith focus:

*We are all valued and we belong to the Creator and to one other.*

### Bible story:

Moses' early life (Exodus 1:12–2:10)

### Introduction:

The story of Moses presents us with a whole new vision of working together based on the right of all people to live free from oppression. In Moses' time, Egyptians lived in luxury. Pharaoh feared the Hebrews and placed them in forced labour—brickmaking. Their spirits were broken. As the story opens, God appears absent. The Creator chooses ordinary people as messengers. Egyptian midwives named Puah (meaning fragrant flower) and Shiprah (meaning beautiful) resist the oppression by not reporting the birth of baby boys. Jochebed and Miriam dream up a plan to save Moses. Pharaoh's daughter has compassion and adopts him.

The story of Moses touches us in many ways. Moses was raised in a culture different from his own. Through his early life, he was connected to his Hebrew cultural traditions; yet he grew up in the home of a princess, in an Egyptian cultural tradition.

Pharaoh's daughter gave Moses his name. *Mose* was a part of well-known Egyptian names (e.g. *Tut-mose*). *Mose*, in itself, is only half a name (meaning "is born"). Whose child is he? What is his true identity? Moses discovers his true identity as the story unfolds.

The experience of Moses connects closely with the realities of today's families when children often have more than one mom and/or dad. Many children from the Native community have been adopted

into white families. Included in today's theme is the theme of older children looking after younger siblings. The questions "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" are central to the story. God loves and cares for us as he cared for Moses.

### Preparation:

Prepare poster with the "Faith focus" of the day written in large print.

### Materials:

- baby basket, old clothes
- popsicle sticks, scissors, glue, cardboard egg cartons for puppets
- weaving materials (see p. 17)
- art materials for invitations (p. 18)

### Part 1

### Community gathering:

Have supplies for art, quiet games and puzzles and provide opportunities for "check in" and sharing.

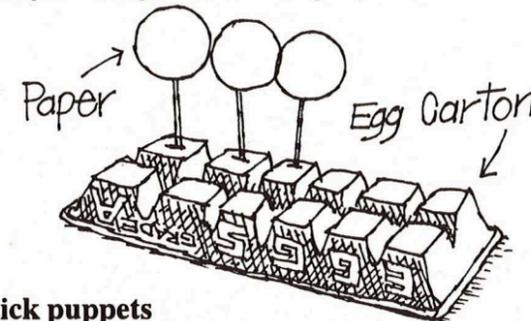
### Circle story time:

Read/tell the story of Moses' early life in *Living God's Way* (pp. 69–71) or Exodus 1:12–2:10 from a *Good News Bible*.

Have children re-enact the story through drama. Have on hand a baby basket and some old clothes. Props for the river may be blue sheets and reeds made from strips of paper. In preparation for the drama, help children name the parts of the story: i.e. Pharaoh gives a command to kill the baby boys; Moses' mother has an idea; Miriam watches over Moses etc. After they've performed the drama ask: "What are your questions about the story? How do you think Miriam felt when Moses was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter? Have you ever looked after your baby brother or sister? Do you worry about younger brothers and sisters?"

Affirm that even though God is present in our lives, we still have many problems. Sometimes we are lonely or afraid.

### Responding to the story:



### Stick puppets

Invite each child to make a set of stick puppets about the Moses story to take home when the session ends. Invite them to choose which characters they would like to make, e.g. the midwives, Miriam, Moses' mother, Jochebed, Moses, Pharaoh's daughter. To make the puppets you will need: popsicle or other sticks, glue, coloured paper, scraps of felt or yarn, scissors, markers or crayons, cardboard egg boxes with slits in each hump. Cut out and decorate the heads of the chosen characters. Glue heads to sticks. The puppets can be propped in the egg cartons as they are made. Children may be encouraged to retell the story at home.

(Adapted from *All My Relations, Sharing Native Values through the Arts, Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native People, Toronto, 1988.*)

*Note: Save the puppets for Session Five.*

Now have the children work in pairs to make up their own stories:

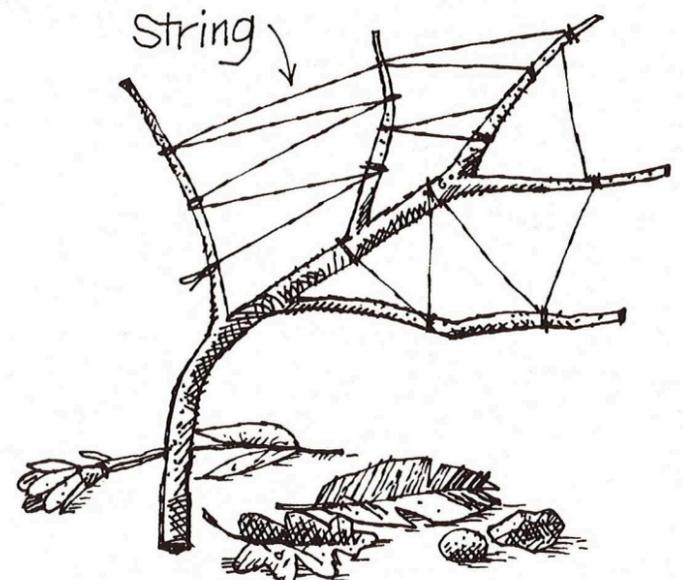
1. Make up a story about what happened to Moses when he went to live at the princess's palace. How did he feel? What games did he play? How was life different?
2. Tell a story about what happened when Moses went back to visit his mother and sister. What things did they do as a family? How did he feel? What teachings did his mother teach him?
3. Make a puppet play about your own family. Pretend you are going to live in a different family. Who would you like to live with? How will it feel to leave home? What is it like to live in a new family?

### Snack/break

### Activity time:

#### Weaving

To affirm that God is present in our lives in many ways, invite the children to form groups to do some weaving. Collect two or three dead branches depending on the size of the group. For weaving materials use fabric strips, yarn, rope, feathers. These materials might represent different people in our lives. Tie string around the branch in a random manner. Weave materials over and under the string. Add natural objects such as feathers, twigs, dried flowers, by poking them through the threads. Affirm that the Creator is present in our lives through nature as well as in people. Weaving can also be done with straws. (Consult an art book for instructions.)



### Lunch break

### Quiet time:

Look for stories on Moses' themes of identity and belonging.

### Story time:

Introduce story time by saying that in Native tradition the community took special care of all children. Stan McKay Sr., an elder who was adopted when a year old, has said it was felt that an adopted child brought special gifts to a family. Read or tell the story by Melody McKellar:

I can really relate to the story of Moses being placed in a basket and adopted. I was adopted when I was a baby. I grew up with adoptive parents who really loved me, but there were times in my life when I knew I was different.

I knew that they loved me, and to me they'd always be my mom and dad. Yet, I always wondered about who I really was. I wondered where I came from? Where did I belong? Did I have brothers and sisters? What were my original mother and father like? Did they miss me? Did they remember the date of my birthday? I went to church in my small community, and I enjoyed learning about spiritual things, but still, I felt that there was something missing.

Slowly I am beginning to understand and accept who I really am. I began to look into Native spirituality and to understand the gifts of my Native tradition. "All my relations" means a lot to me. All of creation is created, and nothing is less than anything else. We are related to each other and connected to the Earth.

**Responding to the story:**

**Body tracing**

To build self-esteem and identity, have the children work in pairs to trace each other's body. You will need long strips of brown or mural paper to enable them to do this. An alternative might be to trace each other's feet. After they've traced, they may wish to cut out and decorate their bodies, or make them look the way they think they'd like to look. On the back of their cut-out bodies, they might write things they wonder about themselves and their families. Talk about the things that help them feel they belong in their families. Ask: "Do you ever feel you don't belong in your family? Why? What might you do to help you feel more accepted by your parents and siblings?"

**Snack**

**Activity:**

To begin to prepare for Session Five's feast and celebration, children might make invitations to invite parents, siblings and special friends. Be sure to state time and place. If appropriate, ask each child to bring one food item for the feast.

**Closure:**

Say goodbye to each child as s/he leaves.

Preparation for Session Five: read Introduction.

# Session Five

**Faith focus:**

*We are all messengers of God, called to bring love and fairness into the lives of others. We also have a right to be treated with love and fairness.*

**Bible story:**

Moses, called to be a messenger of healing and hope (Exodus 2: 11-25; Exodus 3: 1-18)

**Introduction:**

This session deals with Moses' call and leadership and affirms that we are all called to be messengers of God. The Creator heard the cries of the oppressed people. He came to Moses, now living in a Midianite Priest's family—but with Hebrew ancestry and Egyptian cultural understandings—and called Moses to be a messenger of hope and healing. At first Moses resisted the call from the Creator. The desire of the Creator was then and is now for all people to live free of justice and oppression. The Creator calls all people to be peace-and justice-makers.

**Preparation and materials:**

- drama props (p. 19, 20)
- stick puppet materials
- magazines, newspapers and large circle for Earth collage (p. 20)
- finger paints/paper for burning bush (p. 20)
- baking and decoration materials for party/feast
- coloured construction paper (p. 21)
- five candles (one red, one yellow, one black and two white) for closing worship (p. 21)

**Community gathering:**

Invite the children to share feelings about their experience in vacation Bible school (or other group). What have they liked? What would they like to change? Sing their favourite songs of the week. Include the Negro spiritual "Go Down Moses" (#143 *The Hymn Book*).

**Circle story time:**

Tell the story (in your own words) of Moses killing a man and going into hiding and his being cared for and called by God. (*Living God's Way*, pp 72-76 or Exodus 2:11-25; 3:1-18(a))

For younger children, you might use the stick puppets they made in Session Four to tell the story. (For example, begin by using a stick puppet of Miriam saying, "Hi, I'm Miriam and I just heard about my brother Moses. He's grown up and he lives in another country." Continue the story of Moses' flight and his call as a messenger of healing and hope.)

Older children may wish to play-act the story using creative movement. The leader tells the story stopping after each sentence to express actions e.g.: "One day while Moses is looking after sheep, he sees a burning bush ....Moses goes closer and finds that the bush is glowing, but it doesn't burn up ....Then Moses hears a voice.... 'Moses,' the voice says....Moses takes off his shoes. 'Moses' the voice says....Moses is afraid and covers his face with his hands.... 'Moses' the voice says... 'Let my people go'... etc."

Ask: "What are your questions about the story? Why do you think Moses was angry? What was happening to Hebrew people in Egypt? How were their lives different than what the Creator intended? What would you do if you saw people being treated unfairly? What do you think this story is about?"

**Responding to the story:**

**Sharing unfair experiences**

Younger children might make a stick puppet of themselves and of the burning bush to add to their puppet collection. Have them think of a time when they were treated unfairly at home\school\in the

group. Invite them to use the puppet to tell their story. What might each person do to bring fairness? (e.g. Talk to the person who treated them unfairly; share their feelings with a parent or friend.)

Older children might perform a modern drama based on the story of God's call to Moses to be a messenger of hope. Help them prepare for the drama by asking: "If the story of Moses happened today, who would be the Hebrew people (refugees, Natives, ex-prisoners, yourselves?); the Egyptian oppressors; Moses and Aaron (messengers of hope); the burning bush (a signal to do something); God the Creator." Make a new story and dramatize it.

Older children may prefer making a collage of pictures, magazine or newspaper clippings telling of people being treated unfairly today. Place a large circle representing the Earth in the middle of the group. Children can place pictures on the Earth as they find them. When the collage is finished, talk about how love and fairness might be brought into some pictures.

End by giving everyone in the circle a hand hug. One person squeezes the hand of the next until the hug is passed around the whole circle.

### Snack break

#### Activity time:

Finger paint a large burning bush. Children might work in pairs using bright reds, oranges and yellows to paint a portion of the bush. Tape all pictures together to make a large bush. Talk about what God the Creator is like. Go around the circle and have each child use one word or phrase to describe what God is like. Affirm that God intended all peoples to enjoy the goodness of creation, to live together in harmony with one another and with all creation.

Older children may wish to bake cookies, muffins, bannock or make decorations for the feast in the afternoon session. Use this as an opportunity to respect one another and treat one another fairly.

### Lunch break

#### Community gathering—quiet time:

Begin with a brief community time, with action songs learned over the week. Complete unfinished crafts.

#### Circle story time:

All of creation is affirmed in Aboriginal teachings. Their way of life respects other human beings, as well as animals and plants. Often the stories have humour and laughter as they teach lessons. Here is a story Stan McKay Sr. heard when he was a boy:

The animals got together and had a meeting. They said to each other: "We have to do something. The winters are very cold here and our coats are not warm enough for the winter. Maybe we should ask Wisahkechahk and see if he can help us."

So, Wisahkechahk came along and said: "Okay, I'll make warmer coats for you and I'll let you know when I have them ready so you can come and get them." One of the things he did was change some of the coats of the animals for winter. For example, the rabbit's summer coat was brown. He made a white coat for him. The same was true of the weasel. All those animals had different coats.

The moose was on his way to get his coat, too, and he crossed a pond. When he went across the pond, he saw a kind of growth in the water that he especially enjoyed. He just had to stop and eat this plant. It was so plentiful.

He didn't realize that time was going by; suddenly he looked up and noticed it was getting late. He jumped up and went to Wisahkechahk to get his coat. Wisahkechahk looked up at him and said: "I'm sorry—there's only one coat left that's a winter coat. I can't do any more for you now. I don't have any more time to work on anything else for you now and that's the one that was meant for you. You'll have to take it."

So, the moose got the coat that was the only one left. He had no choice and it was too big. It hung loose. That's why the moose has a coat that hangs loose. He was late and he didn't get the right fit.

#### Responding to the story:

Have the children re-enact the story. Let them choose what animal they wish to be. Have them create a movement to represent the animal. Have someone pretending to be Wisahkechahk stand in the centre of the circle with coloured construction paper to change the colours of the animals. A large coat is needed for the child pretending to be a moose. Invite children to make the movement of their chosen animal as they come into the centre of the circle. Have the rest of the children guess which animal they are. When they are correctly guessed, Wisahkechahk could change their colour (pin on) and they can move out of the circle.

Have a circle sharing time by asking: "What do you think the story is about?" Talk about how the animals learned to respect time and relationships.

#### Feast/Party of celebration:

Set up the room for the party. You may wish to have outdoor activities as well.

#### Closing worship:

Invite the children to form a circle. Place five candles on a small table at the centre of the circle, four in the colours of the four directions (see Session Two), and a white candle in the centre to represent the Creator.

Bring the large circles of the four directions and any crafts or activities the children have made into the centre of the circle.

Light each of the candles as the "Prayer in Four Directions" (p.9) is said. Then pass the white candle around the circle. As the candle is passed, have all the children say: "Thank you Creator for Mary, for John, etc." End with a prayer thanking the Creator for meeting new friends, discovering gifts and all things people have done during the week.