

I Believe in God: Creation and Evolution

SESSION ONE LEADER GUIDE

This leader guide is designed to follow each page of the first session: “I Believe in God: Creation and Evolution” with background for the leader and helpful references for expanding the learning. This first lesson may be taught as one longer continuous session, such as at a retreat setting, or as separate sessions (approximately one hour) that cover each page of the session. You may wish to have youth view the website, or individual pages, on their own, then gather as a group to discuss and explore the learning. The website is also useful within the classroom as a teaching tool to introduce the material, then youth may revisit it later to reinforce learning at home. While the curriculum offers prompts for guiding conversation and offers direction for teaching the material, it is important to prepare your own answers for questions and notes for discussion. Sharing your personal experience and insight with the group is a valuable resource for these lessons.

OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, the students will be better able to :

- Discuss ways that humans interpret origins through science and a belief in God;
- Contrast and compare the ways that science and religion understand how the world came into existence

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The conversation between faith/religion and science can be difficult to navigate with youth who live in a world where they are bombarded by a great amount of information and opinions. It is important to first set a safe learning environment where differing opinions are respected and confidentiality is secured.

You may also want to consult with parents/guardians prior to beginning

this session to alert them to the concepts taught in this session, and invite them to preview the website. Many adults are unfamiliar with ways to talk about both evolution and Creation, or may have beliefs that are challenged by this learning.

Within any group of youth you will find a wide range of maturity and development levels. In general, adolescent-aged students (12-14) are able to engage in more complex thinking, reason deductively, and are better able to form concepts about the past, present, and future than their elementary counterparts. As adolescence is achieved, they can synthesize values and beliefs with their own experiences to create meaning and understanding for life. This is also a time when a sense of personal identity is being formed, and this extends to their identity as it relates to the concepts of science and faith.

SUPPLIES FOR SESSION ONE:

- Copies of NRSV* Bible – 1/pair of youth
- Copy of *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* by Charles Darwin
- Sheets of paper, pencils - 1/ person
- Poster board, markers/crayons, pictures that represent evolution and Creation, glue sticks, pens - 1 set/ group of 3 or 4 people
- Computer and access to Internet

* Note: If an alternate version of the Bible is preferred, then the references listed below will need to be adapted to accommodate another version.

TO BEGIN:

Gather youth and provide an overview of lesson(s) to be covered in I BELIEVE IN GOD: CREATION AND EVOLUTION session(s). Discuss the need for a safe and confidential environment. Ask youth to list ways for their group to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. If possible, list these ideas on a white board, or a computer document and read the completed list once all have offered input for the agreement. Ask all present, youth and adults, to agree to follow these guidelines for the duration of the learning time together.

PAGE ONE – I BELIEVE IN GOD: CREATION AND EVOLUTION

Begin the lesson by asking the group to define a creed or faith statement.

Allow all answers.

Discuss the definition: A statement or set of formal beliefs, usually Christian; a set of guidelines that define how you live.

Ask: What is a common set of beliefs for Christians? *Allow all answers.*

Discuss the Apostle's Creed: It is a document created that states a belief in a God who created everything, in Jesus Christ who is God's son, and in the Holy Spirit. Share the following information:

The Apostles' Creed as we now have it dates from the eighth century. But in truth its roots are in the "Old Roman Creed," which was used in some parts of the ancient church as early as the third century. Before the Old Roman Creed, in turn, were variations rooted in the New Testament itself. While this creed does not come from the apostles (Jesus' followers sent to share the good news), its roots are apostolic (in keeping with the teaching of the New Testament apostles).

Note: It might be helpful to print out a copy of the downloadable PDF file of the Apostle's Creed to assist discussion.

Discuss a faith statement as used by the United Church of Christ using the following information. See also www.ucc.org for more information:

The original (traditional) version of the UCC Statement of Faith was adopted in 1959 by General Synod and is widely regarded as one of the most significant Christian faith testimonies of the 20th century. The Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology was authorized by Executive Council in 1981. For these and other affirmations of the Christian faith, see the Book of Worship of United Church of Christ and The New Century Hymnal.

(www.ucc.org)

Have the group recite the first line of the creed in unison, as listed below, or use an alternate version of a faith statement as listed below.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Faith Statement*

***We believe in you O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:
You call the worlds into being,
create persons in your own image,
and set before each one the ways of life and death.***

***Statement of Faith, revised 1981 (in the form of a Doxology), affirmed by the Fourteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ.**

<http://www.ucc.org/education/polity/pdf-folder/statement-of-faith-lth-vii-7.pdf>

Ask: What are Christians talking about when they make these statements?
Allow all answers.

Discuss with the group their understanding of how God might have created heaven, earth, and all living things.

Show students the copy of *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* by Charles Darwin.

Discuss the book: Published in 1859 by Charles Darwin and it outlines the research he completed that led him to develop the theory of evolution.

Ask: When scientists, or others, make the statement that they believe that living things evolved over time, what do they mean?

Review the basics of evolution:

There are different kinds of living things (species) but there is variation within each species.

Living things make new members (reproduce) but not all members survive.

Living things compete for food and space, and need to change or adapt to the world in order to keep competing for food and space

Living things that adapt better than others survive and pass on abilities, or favored traits, to offspring

Living things that can't adapt die and after awhile their entire species may become extinct

Summary of information from: Mark J. Handwerker, *Science Essentials Middle School Level: Lessons and Activities for Test Preparation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 355.

Next: Review the information on page one of the website, I BELIEVE IN GOD: CREATION AND EVOLUTION, and have the group watch the video link from the Big Bang Theory.

Discuss with the group why they feel that some Christians and some scientists disagree so strongly about the claims of Creation and of Darwin's theory of evolution. Be attentive to the need for each group member to honor the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of each other. Allow the discussion to continue for as long as interest is maintained. You may continue on with the lesson to PAGE TWO – THE TWO STORIES, or bring the session to a close. If the session will end, encourage students to do research, on their own, to find news related items that address both the understanding of Creation and Evolution, and to bring those back to future sessions.

PAGE TWO – THE TWO STORIES

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to share any information they may have gathered in researching news articles related to the understanding of Creation and evolution.

To begin, distribute Bibles to the group and ask them to find the story of Creation. *Allow time for students to locate Genesis and report back to the group when it is located.*

Ask the group to show where the story is located. *Some may only select Genesis 1, and others may add Genesis 2 as part of the Creation story.*

Ask: How many Creation stories are in this first book of the Bible?

Direct the group to look at both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 and note the two different versions.

Have the group, in turn, read Genesis 1 through 2:4

Distribute paper and pencils to group members and have them, individually or in pairs, list the facts from this story.

Next, have the group in turn read Genesis 2:5-24 and make a second list of the facts from this story.

Ask students to list the reasons for why they believe one story is more true or factual than the other. *Allow all answers.*

Next, review the information from page two of the website, THE TWO STORIES, and stop at the section with the Bible verse listings.

Review the facts that the group listed from each story, using the verses displayed side-by-side on page two, and then continue to the information listed after the verses.

Discuss the possible reasons for the two different stories and review the information on page two regarding the Genesis authors and look at the link to "Basic Bible Information and Interpretation." You will need to enter a search for Old Testament, and Genesis, and look under each tab to research the information about this story.

Next, ask the group if they are familiar with the myths that influenced the Creation stories. Many middle school students have heard of the Mesopotamian myths that were used in ancient times and that they influenced biblical stories. Ask the group to share any information they might have about these myths. More information about this can also be found on the “Basic Bible Information and Interpretation” link under the tab labeled “Introductory Issues.”

Continue reviewing page two of the website under the section “Origin of Species” and watch the video about Charles Darwin.

Ask: Does this learning about the writers of Genesis and Charles Darwin change how you think about evolution and Creation? Why or why not? How has your thinking about evolution and Creation changed since you were younger?

Discuss the reasons for why others might disagree about these two ways of understanding the origin of life.

To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about the understandings of evolution and Creation as working together. Encourage members to make a list of “I Believe” statements that include both understandings of evolution and Creation.

If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of Creation and Evolution, and to bring those ideas back to future sessions.

PAGE THREE – WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding and conversations they might have had with family or friends regarding their understanding of evolution and Creation.

Prior to gathering the group to review this third page, preview the slide show at the top of the page and read the following information:

The slideshow displayed at the top of this page contains a number of images that represent the different ways that people believe, or understand evolution and Creation. These are images that are among the many that are available in the media and on the Internet and are only a small representation of what youth might encounter. The group will view these images during this portion of the lesson.

From the start of the slide show they appear as follows:

A view of a spiral galaxy,

Display of an evolutionary timeline,

*A display from a Creation museum showing a fossil with a thorn that is labeled: “According to God’s word thorns came after Adam’s sin, about six thousand years ago, not millions of years ago. Since we have discovered thorns in the fossil record, along with dinosaurs and with other plants and animals, they all must have lived at the same time as humans, after Adam’s sin”**

Dinosaur fossils in a museum,

*A diorama of Adam and Eve from a Creation museum**

A display comparing dinosaur and human traits,

A gorilla (the largest of the apes),

Planets,

A vehicle advertising belief in Intelligent Design,

*A picture of a caveman disputing **creationism***

What is Creationism? In general, a creationist believes that God created everything and denies that evolutionary processes are responsible for either the beginning of life, or of new species. Creationists typically take the story of Genesis literally, and some actually use science to support their beliefs.

**See: www.creationmuseum.org for more examples of this viewpoint.*

**For a creationist, the importance of placing Adam and the event of original sin before any other evidence of life is that if there were no original sin to begin with, or “fall,” then atonement and salvation would not have happened.*

** Also, for a more detailed explanation of the full spectrum of beliefs see: Ted Peters and Martinez Hewlett, *Darwin 200th Anniversary Edition, Can You Believe in God and Evolution: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008)*

To begin this portion of the lesson, have page three visible to the group and read through the information and watch the video links on the page.

Discuss the following with the group, encouraging each member to offer a response:

What do you think about a law that either prevents the teaching of evolution, as in the past, or the teaching of Creation in public schools? (Note: Public schools are allowed to teach *about* religion(s), but may not promote any type of specific belief system.)

What are the ways that you have learned about science and religion in school?

How does the idea of Intelligent Design make it easier or harder for people to talk about science and faith together?

Next, have the group look at the slideshow at the top of the page, and ask

that everyone wait until all pictures are viewed before making comments. Invite the group to respond to the images and allow time for each member to add to the conversation.

Using the information provided at the beginning of this session, talk about each of the images. (Remind the group to be respectful of each other's response.) The white dots that appear at the lower right of the slideshow can be used to select and navigate through the ten images.

Ask the group to share what each image might mean to them, or how the image might cause them to respond to the ideas of evolution and Creation. For example, the first picture of the swirled cosmos might be considered a scientific picture, or one that depicts God or God's power. The picture of a gorilla might be seen as an ape that might be related to humans, or as one of God's amazing creations.

Discuss with the group their experiences in talking about evolution and Creation. What is most difficult, or easiest to talk about?

To close the session allow the group to look at the Creation Museum website, and to do a search of the term "evolution." Talk about what these images might promote that is challenging to the conversation about evolution and Creation. If the group is not able to participate in this, ask that they spend time at home looking at the website and researching the term evolution and to bring back any interesting information they may have discovered. Ask each member to bring a copy of any images that represent their belief in Creation and evolution to the next session.

PAGE FOUR – FINDING YOUR VOICE

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another's opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members regarding any research for the term "evolution" they might have completed.

This final page of **I BELIEVE IN GOD: CREATION AND EVOLUTION** focuses on helping youth find their voice in the conversation between evolution and Creation. The group will create a poster or display that contains images and statements to help them express both a belief in a Creator and in the scientific theory of evolution. If youth are able to bring images that represent their belief in Creation and evolution to the session, incorporate these into the poster/display. Otherwise, you will need to provide samples of these to be chosen by group members.

To begin the session, open the website and review the first three pages of **I BELIEVE IN GOD: CREATION AND EVOLUTION**. Ask the group members to share one significant thing they may have learned or discovered about Creation and evolution. Discuss how they might have engaged other youth or family members in this learning and any conversations that might have occurred, either in person or in a social media setting.

Next, look at page four, FINDING YOUR VOICE, and review the information listed on the page. Reinforce the concept that science is tasked with discovering *how* things work and tries to provide *proof*, and religion looks at *why* things happen and looks for a *purpose*. Help the group understand that this is a basic way of looking at this issue, and that just like science and religion, their ideas will change and become more complex. However, both evolution and Creation are ways for us to understand how all of life is connected.

Next, depending on the size of the group, divide members into smaller groups of three or four. Distribute poster board, markers, pens, and glue sticks to each group. Have a set of images that either you or students have collected.

Direct each group to create a poster/display that shows how they believe evolution and Creation can be connected. Encourage groups to write "I Believe..." statements on the poster/display that were written from the

session for page two.

Display these for the congregation, or have youth take pictures of their work to share with friends and family.

For additional learning, ask a member of the congregation or other source who has a career in science to come and share how they integrate their faith and scientific beliefs.