

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 many 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 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 on PAGE ONE 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-1th-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.