

EYFS special places: lessons using persona dolls

Notes about using persona dolls

Persona dolls are an extremely valuable tool in supporting learning about and from different religions. By encouraging children to enter imaginatively into the life of the doll, they can be introduced to situations, ideas and issues that are significant and relevant to them and also experiences that are sometimes very different from their own.

Persona dolls should be recognised as special and generally only used in planned teaching and learning sessions. Practitioners are encouraged to use open-ended questions that will stimulate discussion, invite participation, help the children relate to the doll and encourage them to ask their own questions. As the material is contextualised in the life of the doll children find it easier to engage with the mystery and wonder of the religion in focus.

Samuel's story (Jewish focus): special places

Inside Samuel's backpack

a duck feather
sticks
Star of David symbol

Special words

Star of David, synagogue, mezuzah,
torah, tallit, kippah, scrolls,
bimah, menorah, Shabbat

Part 1: A Special Place in the Natural World

Sit Samuel in a circle with the children in your group.

Place the backpack in the centre of the circle and take out the duck feather and sticks. Explain that today we are thinking about special places and Samuel has brought something that reminds him of his favourite place.

? Samuel wants us to guess where his favourite place might be?

Samuel loves to walk with his family by the river. Whenever he is by the river Samuel remembers Tashlich when all the things he is sorry about float away down the river. The feather reminds Samuel of last spring when he saw a mother duck and her family of ducklings swimming in a line behind her. It made him think about his own family and how precious they are.

Samuel has brought some sticks to show you, like the ones he and his family throw from the bridge over the river and watch as they float by on the water.

👏 Talk to the children about rivers they have seen. Were they fast, rushing rivers or slow and steady? Were they muddy and brown or sparkling and clear? Were they deep and dark or shallow and clear? Use music or percussion instruments to help children dance the "story" of a river from its birth as a mountain spring to its end as it joins the sea. Children can perform their dances to Samuel who can be the audience.

Part 2: Samuel's Special Place of Worship

Sit Samuel in a circle with the children in your group.

Place the backpack in the centre of the circle and take out the **Star of David** symbol.

Explain to the children that Samuel would like them to look out for this special symbol as he takes them on a tour of the **synagogue**. It is his special place of worship.

The accompanying CD, "Special Places", shows Samuel visiting his **synagogue**. The slides are:

1. **Samuel's synagogue.** This is Samuel's **synagogue**. He comes here each Saturday morning to celebrate **Shabbat**. Samuel also comes on other days to meet with his friends at Heder, the Jewish school where children learn to read the **Torah**.
2. **Mezuzah.** Samuel is looking at a **mezuzah**; One of these is fixed to the frame of each door in the **synagogue**. Inside the **mezuzah** is a small piece of parchment on which is written words that remind Samuel to love God with all his heart, spirit and strength.
3. **The Star of David.** Do you remember Samuel's **Star of David**? Here it is on the windows. Can you see it in any other places in the **synagogue**?
4. **The tallit.** Samuel is showing us the prayer shawl that he will wear for worship when he is older. It is called a **Tallit**. He is also wearing his **Kippah**, a small cap worn by Jewish men and boys.
5. **The bimah.** Samuel is standing at the **bimah**, which is the place in the **synagogue** where the **Torah** is read to everyone. The **Torah** is the holy book for Jews. Samuel is looking towards the Ark, which is covered by curtains. Can you see the everlasting light burning above the Ark? This shows that God is always present in the **synagogue**.
6. **The Torah scrolls.** Behind the curtains inside the Ark are the **scrolls** on which the **Torah** is written. A scroll is a long strip of parchment paper rolled around 2 long poles. Can you see the beautiful covers with silver decorations? During **Shabbat**, the **scrolls** are taken out of the Ark and paraded around the **synagogue**.
7. **A small scroll.** Samuel is showing us a small **scroll**. Can you see the **Star of David** embroidered on the front?
8. **In front of the Ark.** Sometimes the person leading worship in the **synagogue** stands at the front to teach about God. Samuel is showing us where he stands.
9. **A menorah.** This special stand for candles is called a **menorah**. This one has 9 branches and is called a Hanukkiah. Can you remember the story of Hanukkah?
10. **Sitting in the synagogue.** When Samuel comes to worship in the **synagogue** he likes to sit with Benjamin. It is good to be together with friends and family for **Shabbat**.

Information about Samuel

Name: Samuel
Age: 5

Gender:	male
Hair:	brown and curly
Eyes:	brown
Nationality:	British
Favourite food:	potato latkes and Lekach (honey cake)
Favourite activities:	football, painting and drawing, shabbat
Family structure:	lives with Mum, Dad and his brother, Joseph (8 yrs)
Father's occupation:	teacher
Mother's occupation:	manager of Kosher food shop
First language:	English
Family history:	great-grandparents came to Britain from Germany in 1939
Religion:	Jewish
Festivals:	Passover, Hanukkah and Rosh Hashanah

Suggested artefacts for Samuel's backpack

Unit: Special Places

a duck feather

sticks

Star of David symbol

