

EYFS Being special: 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.

Elizabeth's Story (Christian focus): being special

Inside Elizabeth's backpack

Text: *God Makes Us Different* by Helen Caswell
or another text about the uniqueness of the individual.
Baptism card showing a family group, baby and vicar
Baptism shawl
Baptism candle

Special words

unique, greetings,
baptism Christian,
baptised, church
christening, welcome
shawl, candle

Lesson 1:

Sit Elizabeth in a circle and welcome her on behalf of the group. Talk with children to find out what they remember about Elizabeth from previous learning.

- ? Can anyone remember what Elizabeth's favourite hobby is? (swimming). Does anyone else enjoy swimming?
- ? What does Elizabeth like to eat (pizza)? Is there anyone here who doesn't like pizza?

This discussion could be extended to focus on similarities and differences between the children in the group.

-  Create a circle with a long rope on the floor, in which Elizabeth is placed. Children who share her preference for pizza join her in the circle, others sit on the outside or sit in another rope circle.

Place Elizabeth's backpack in the centre of the circle and take out the text *God Makes Us Different* by Helen Caswell (or another text about the **unique** nature of each living creature). Explain to the children that this is one of Elizabeth's favourite books. She would like everyone to listen carefully while it is read.

Talk about the book with the children and explain that Elizabeth believes that **God** makes us all different because he wants the world to be an exciting, colourful and surprising place, where we can enjoy learning about everything he has made.

-  Ask the children to identify the things which make each one of us different (eg hair and eye colour) and characteristics that we all share (eg we all breathe, we all have feelings such as happiness and pain).

Lesson 2:

Sit Elizabeth in a circle with children in your group.

Place the backpack in the centre of the circle. Explain that Elizabeth has brought something to show everyone that she is going to give her baby cousin, Winston, at a celebration next Sunday. Winston lives in London on a city farm. Talk with the children about what a city farm is and why Elizabeth loves to visit. Take out the baptism card, but do not introduce the term, baptism, at this point. Discuss with the children the occasions on which they receive **greetings** cards from their friends or family. (birthdays, Christmas, Eid, Hanukkah etc).

- ? Do you enjoy receiving **greetings** cards? Why?
- ? Pass around the **baptism** card. Can anyone guess what Winston's special celebration might be? (the pictures on the card should give a clue.)

If no one has guessed, explain that next Sunday Elizabeth's cousin, Winston, will be **baptised** at his **church**. Elizabeth and Winston's family are **Christians** and everyone will be there to see Winston's **church family greeting** or **welcoming** him as their newest member. Some people call this a "**christening**".

- ? Has anyone been to a **baptism** or **christening**? What do they remember about it?
- ? Elizabeth is not sure what to write in her **baptism** card to Winston. Can you give her some ideas?

Elizabeth can't wait for the weekend and will tell us about it next time.

- ? Making people feel **welcome** is very important. Can anyone in the group remember how they felt on their first day at school?
- ? How does our school make new children feel **welcome**, eg special welcome assembly. How do we make new children feel **welcome** to our group or class? What else could we do?

Think of the ways that we **greet** others; eg shaking hands, smiling, kissing, hugging. Discuss what these actions mean. Pass smiles, hugs and handshakes and help the children describe how it makes them feel.

Another way of making someone feel **welcome** is to give a card.

- ? If we made **welcome** cards for new children in our group, what could we draw or write on them?
-  Children could design and make their own **welcome** cards for new members to the group.

Lesson 3:

Sit Elizabeth in a circle with children in your group.

Place the backpack in the centre of the circle and take out Winston's white **baptism shawl** and the **baptism candle**.

Winston's Mum has allowed Elizabeth to bring in the **shawl** to show everyone. It is very precious as it has been used by all the babies in Winston's and Elizabeth's family on their **baptism** day. Elizabeth wants everyone to know that it is very precious.

? Has anyone ever seen a **shawl** like this before? What do you think it is used for?

? Can anyone remember why Elizabeth was going to see her cousin, Winston, in London?

At Winston's **baptism**, the vicar explained to the people that **God** sent his son **Jesus** to show how much he loved the world. When **Jesus** was a young man he was **baptised** in the River Jordan. (Take time to describe this event, using a good quality children's Bible with appropriate pictures to show everyone.)

In the **baptism** service some water was poured over Winston's head, which was scooped from the **church font**, a big stone bowl. This showed that Winston had become a follower of **Jesus**. Winston's parents were given a lighted **candle** to remind everyone that **Jesus** called himself the 'Light of the World'.

-  Light the **baptismal candle**, explaining that Winston's Mum has allowed Elizabeth to bring the candle to show everyone in the class.
-  Invite an Anglican minister to demonstrate very simply how a **baptism** is conducted using a baby doll to represent Winston. Let the children dress up to take the role of the congregation including family members and godparents.
-  In the following days set up a '**font**' in a corner of the classroom and let the children role play the **baptism** ceremony using a baby doll wrapped in a white **shawl**.

Elizabeth's Little Book

Name:	Elizabeth
Age:	5
Gender:	female
Hair:	black and curly
Eyes:	brown
Nationality:	British
Family origin:	Jamaica
Favourite food:	pizza, pineapples, ice-cream
Favourite activities:	swimming, playing on local adventure playground, visiting cousins on their city farm
Family structure:	lives with Mum
Mother's occupation:	Computer Programmer
First language:	English
Family history:	Elizabeth's great grandparents came to Britain from Jamaica in 1952
Religion:	Christian (Anglican)
Special times:	Christmas, Easter, Harvest, Pentecost

