



Topical Guide: Quizzes in a Children's Programme

The quiz time in any children's programme should be seen as a key part of the overall teaching programme. It isn't merely a fun time to keep the children from being bored; a kind of carrot to keep them coming so you can "Give them the Gospel" later on.

As with all parts of any programme, it should serve a specific purpose. We'll look at where it can come in the programme; types and contents of questions; different methods of scoring and what the purpose of a quiz is anyway.

Why have a quiz?

The quiz is so often seen as merely a light-hearted part of the programme; a fun time. This is because it so often *is* only that! It must be enjoyable, but that does *not* mean it cannot at the same time serve a very useful purpose in the overall teaching strategy. What then is this purpose?

The quiz is an excellent opportunity to reinforce what has been learned during the full programme. Questions can be asked about the songs, memory verse, prayer time, truth spot or story. General or trivial questions should be avoided. Each question should count for something.

When is the best time in the programme for the quiz?

This depends on whether you want to use it to reinforce what was taught in a previous programme or to reinforce material from the same programme.

Placed first, it can be a fun introduction, revising material from last time and providing a summary of what was covered for those who were absent. It is also a means of testing the effectiveness of your teaching by how much is or isn't recalled!

Drawbacks of having the quiz at the beginning are that children who missed the last programme may not be able to answer the questions and so feel "out of it." Care must be taken to avoid losing control by letting the children get over excited and so disrupt the teaching later on.

Placed at the end it can be used effectively to review the day's material. All the children can take part and material is fresh in their mind. At this stage, there is less need to limit the children's exuberant excitement.

The drawback of using a quiz at the end of a programme to review material from a previous one is that it tends to displace or confuse the new material just covered.

A quiz can also be split into two or more parts or two separate quizzes used at different points to review different material. The drawback is that it tends to fragment the programme making it "bitty."

Preparing for the quiz

Decide on what material you are going to base your questions.

Select a suitable scoring method. This may determine how many questions you will need. If your quiz is fairly general you may choose a scoring method which takes a variable or unpredictable number of questions to complete, such as noughts and crosses.

If however you want to make sure that certain questions are used for review purposes, make sure you ask the most important questions first or choose a scoring method with a fixed number of questions, or at least a minimum number required to complete it which will include all your important questions.

Write out your questions clearly, in the order they are to be asked including the answer. This is especially important if you will not be asking the questions yourself. Bear in mind that if you have two people asking questions, one to each side, they should be written out alternately on two sheets of paper in a logical order. Make sure that the first question asked is the first question in the series.

It is possible to make up questions as you go along, but difficult to structure as well as questions prepared beforehand. It is also harder to include all the material you want to review. If the person asking the questions delays while thinking, it gives a sloppy, unprepared, impression and stops the quiz flowing smoothly which may result in the children losing attention.

Teams

How you divide your children will depend on a number of factors. Assess your group and be flexible. Moving children around can cause more trouble than it is worth.

Ways of dividing a group

By Sex

Boys against girls works well, however politically incorrect this may be! However, it is important not to let friendly competition get out of hand. It is a good way of dividing a mixed age and sex group into two roughly equal sized groups with built in identity and a good age range in each. Make sure that there are about the same number of boys and girls. Many children's clubs and Sunday Schools have more girls than boys.

Make sure you know which side's question it is as both sides will try to answer all the questions!

By Sides or Rows

Dividing the room into two sides or front row or rows against back row or rows can work well, though each side needs to be given an identity of its own. It is important that there is a good range of ages and abilities on both sides. An uneven spread results in the weaker side becoming discouraged and giving up.

By Groups

If children are put in groups for craft or other activities, these divisions can be used. This only really works if they have a badge identifying which group they are in and if the groups are mixed age with a good range. As the two sides in the quiz should be roughly equal in size, it works best where children are in even numbers of smaller groups of about the same size.

Make sure you and the children know which groups are on which side. Having two groups in one team leads to some loss of identity, so a new name for the combined group could be chosen to avoid cheering for a team with a cumbersome combination name.

Questions

Keep them as simple as possible.

Make sure they are unambiguous. If for example you ask, “Who was swallowed by a whale?” and a child answers, “Pinocchio!” you must give it, as it is a right answer to the question you asked! You may have intended the answer to be the Biblical answer, but you didn’t state that, so to be fair, you must give it and explain what you wanted. (Jonah was actually swallowed by a big fish anyway and not by a whale). Careful preparation and wording should avoid such awkward occurrences!

Make each question count. See each as an opportunity to reinforce or teach something useful.

Vary the types of question.

Make sure all questions are fair and answerable. Do not use trivial guessing questions such as, “How old am I?” They serve no useful purpose and are unfair. If you feel you must use “silly” questions, make sure that each side get the same number.

Make sure that each team’s questions are of the same level of difficulty.

Make sure that there are questions which even the youngest children could be expected to be able to answer.

Types of Questions

Factual: Who? What? Why? When? Where? How?

Examples

Who betrayed Jesus? (Judas Iscariot).

What did Jesus tell the paralysed man to do? (Pick up his mat and walk).

Why did Zacchaeus climb a tree? (To see Jesus, because he was small).

When did Jesus come back from the dead? (On the third day).

Where did they arrest Jesus? (In the Garden of Gethsemane).

How did God punish the world in the time of Noah? (By sending a flood).

Hint

Avoid questions with almost universally known answers like, “Who was Jesus’ mother?” It doesn’t teach anything new.

Multiple choice

Example

In the New Testament, are there a) 39 b) 27 or c) 66 books? (27).

Hint

Make all the possibilities plausible. A bad question would be, “Which of these people do not appear in the Bible? a) Moses b) Abraham or c) Elvis Presley. The answer is so obvious as to defeat the object of asking it.

Which is the odd one out?

Example

Which of these is not a book in the New Testament? a) Matthew b) Paul or c) Luke. (Paul).

Hint

Here too, make all the possibilities plausible. Paul is a well known Bible character, even though he doesn’t have a Bible book named after him. A bad question would be, “Which of these is not a book in

the Bible? a) Treasure Island b) Leviticus or c) Matthew. Again, the answer is so obvious as to defeat the object of asking it.

Matching pairs

Give the missing one.

Examples

Cain and...(Abel). Jacob and...(Esau).

Hint

Some may have more than one answer, e.g. Jacob and (Esau, Leah, or Rachel). Be prepared to accept answers which are correct but which you had not thought of, or make your question unambiguous!

True or false

Example

Peter was Andrew's brother. (True). The New Testament is longer than the Old Testament. (False).

Hint

Always explain why the answer is true or false.

Complete the verse

Example

Romans 6:23: The wages of sin is... (Death).

Hint

Make sure the children have come across the verse you quote.

Fill in the missing word

Similar to complete the verse.

Example

John 3:16: For God so loved the..... that he gave his one and only Son. (World).

Hint

Again, make sure the children have come across the verse or phrase you use.

Who or what am I?

Example

"God gave them to Moses on Mount Sinai." (Two stone tablets).

Think of intriguing ways of asking questions. For example, "Who betrayed Jesus?" can be asked as, "He betrayed Jesus in the garden with a kiss. Who was he?"

Write them out and include the answer you want. This is especially important if you are not asking the questions yourself.

Rules

Keep them simple, remind the children of them often and enforce them fairly.

1. Sit on your bottom.
2. Keep your mouth closed.
3. Keep your ears open.
4. Put your hand up if you know the answer.

A cheerful, lighthearted yet firm manner will help these rules to be accepted. It's important that you don't accept answers that are shouted out or from children standing up and clamouring for attention. Good control is fundamental to an enjoyable quiz.

Sweets

To use or not to use?

Experience shows that giving out sweets can cause more trouble than it is worth in a quiz. In a larger group there will only be a few who get one anyway which can create jealousy, especially if everyone feels they can answer the questions. These days some parents do not allow their children to eat sweets for dental reasons, so giving sweets to these children can put them in a difficult position as most children like sweets!

It is good to cultivate among the children a spirit of enjoyment derived from taking part and gaining satisfaction from learning and giving the correct answers rather than always to win something. We shouldn't however not use sweets simply to save money.

Make your own decision, but have a carefully thought out reason for arriving at it.

Giving them out

If you do give out sweets, it is important to have the person responsible give it to the child after they have chosen the number in the scoring system. Many quizzes have been disrupted as a sweet is thrown to a child immediately they answers correctly but before they choose a number on the scoring system. The child then scrambles after the sweet while the person trying to run the quiz desperately attempts to extract a choice from them so the next question can be asked. If the sweet is given after he has made his choice, it doesn't matter if he takes all day to find it! His search will not impede the flow of the quiz. It is of course better not to throw sweets at all, but rather give them personally!

Suitable sorts of sweets

Whether you are inside or outside, wrapped sweets are by far the best.

Avoid boiled sweets, especially round ones. I have seen a child choke as she rapidly breathed in with a smooth boiled sweet in her mouth from answering a previous question when she suddenly realised that she knew the answer to this question too!

Use quality sweets which children like but which are not too sticky. Discarded sweets, especially when half chewed, are not easy to clean up! It is not much of a reward if they don't like what they get as well as being a waste of money. Wrapped fudge or toffees are about the best, though dentists may disagree!

Litter

Encourage the children to throw their sweet wrappers in the bins you should provide. This in itself is a good training exercise.

An alternative to sweets?

Small cards or tokens may be given out instead. These can be collected afterwards and the points added to an existing incentive system or redeemed for prizes in some other way.

Practical Guidelines for Running a Quiz

Be prepared in advance

This includes having all the questions ready and the scoring method set up before the programme. It is very frustrating trying to set up a quiz with children clamouring round. It interrupts the programme and makes hiding scores in some cases impossible. Besides, the time before the programme starts is a great opportunity to chat with and get to know the children. You should be completely set up before any children arrive.

Explain all the rules clearly and stick to them

Don't ask questions while children are talking.

Don't accept answers, even correct ones from children breaking the rules.

Handing over questions

Decide yourself whether questions are to be handed over to the other side if a wrong answer is given or not. If you give the same side two turns, make sure the other side also gets two turns! You must be seen to be totally fair. True or false questions can obviously not be handed over fairly.

If you find you need to ask another question to the same side for any reason (you may find you did not cover something you thought you had) ask the next one in the series, not the next one on your sheet if you are using two. If you do, the next question for the other side will be out of order. Either swap sheets or make up a new question.

Make it exciting

Choose interesting scoring methods and don't use the same one week after week, however much they seem to enjoy it.

Encourage cheering etc., but don't let it get out of hand and prevent the quiz being useful as well as fun.

Try to make an exciting finish. If you have the best of three, try to make it go to three, but do not cheat. There are ways of arranging this! If for example you want to try to prevent one side getting a point in order to stop the other side getting too far behind, pick a child who you think might not know the answer but has their hand up anyway.

Ask questions clearly

You may need to rephrase a question prepared in advance if it is not understood or if the group are younger than anticipated.

Pick a child to give the answer quickly

This keeps the quiz moving and saves time. It also prevents the group getting out of hand, clamouring to be picked.

Don't keep picking the same child

If your questions are on material familiar to the whole group, all should have a fair chance to answer. Be aware of the younger, quieter children or those at the periphery of the meeting. Try to draw answers out of those who lack the confidence to answer, but you are sure know the answer. Don't however persist long enough to disrupt the flow.

Always repeat the answers given

If you are using a quiz to reinforce material learned, it is important that all the children hear both the question and the answer. Repeat even a wrong answer, gently explaining, if needs be, why it is wrong.

Be encouraging

If a child gives a good answer, credit him with it and explain why it is not the one you wanted. If a correct answer is given, where there is more than one answer, but not the one you wanted, give it and give yours too, or press for the answer you wanted as well.

Never humiliate a child in public, even if he gives what you consider to be a stupid answer. Say, “Good try! but not what I was after,” rather than, “NO! That’s the wrong answer!”

If a bright child has answered several questions, commend them on their knowledge and ask someone else. Don’t say, “Not you! You have answered three already!”

Don’t be unintentionally discouraging

Saying, “This is for the under seven’s” immediately makes all the over sevens switch off and look for some alternative to occupy themselves which may be distracting other children. Just ask it and pick a child under seven to answer it!

Don’t waste time

If no-one knows the answer, don’t try endlessly to extract it. Give it and ask another question. If your questions are well prepared and based on familiar, recently taught material, this should not happen.

Don’t get children out to the front to pick a number on the scoring system. It wastes time needlessly.

Use children’s names

Make a real effort, especially with a regular group, to learn and use their names. It is not very personal to say, “The little boy at the back.” He may also have been told by his parents that he is a big boy now!

Be very careful how you refer to children whose names you do not know. “You with the glasses on” may seem innocent enough, but she may hate them and not like to be reminded she is wearing them! Be sensitive at all times. You can’t easily retract words spoken.

Scoring Methods

Basic Types

There are three basic categories of scoring a quiz. Those where a point is awarded for each correct answer; those which involve a degree of skill, such as throwing a ring over a series of numbered pegs, and those which involve chance, using a dice for example, to determine the score for getting a question right.

Those where straight points are given tend to be uninteresting and unless one side receives a handover question, the side that starts wins! Building up two pictures or jigsaws on a board falls into this category.

This could be made more interesting and unpredictable by mixing both sets of pieces and picking them out of a bag. If a piece for the opposite side is chosen, it could either be put up on their side or put back in the bag.

Alternatively, you could simply award a point for each question answered correctly and count up after each side have been asked an equal number of questions.

Another way still is to ask the side with the first hand up, stopping reading the question immediately the first hand is raised. If they put their hand up before hearing enough of the question to answer it, the whole question is given to the other side. This method can work quite well, but you have to be very alert.

Those involving a degree of skill can be fun, but can discourage the less able children if they are seen to let their side down by missing the target. Here the points awarded are for skill in performing whatever exercise is set rather than for answering the question correctly.

Those methods where the points gained depend on chance always seem to be the most exciting and do not penalise those less skilled in throwing hoops for example. They are less predictable and can often provide a very exciting finish to a programme.

There are many ways of visually scoring a quiz. The following are just a few ideas.

One point per question

Building up two pictures or objects with equal number of pieces.

Those involving some skill

Throwing darts at a target.

Building a tower out of paper cups.

Throwing rings over numbered hooks.

Those involving chance

Board games like snakes & ladders using a dice.

Choosing a number on the board behind which is hidden a score or piece to be collected.

Bursting balloons in which have been placed screws of paper with different scores written on.

The above are just broad categories. How you flesh them out is left to your imagination. Visual aids for scoring quizzes are available from "Tell the Children"

Visual aids

It is worth taking time and spending money to gather and look after a good set of attractive visual aids.