



*Which comes first, Pentecost or Jesus' Baptism?
What does God's story matter to my story?
Does my family's story matter to God?*

A Learning Unit Idea for preteens and high school youth.

Learning Goal:

"Students will gain a 'big-picture' understanding of the New Testament (NT) Story and relate God's Story to their Story."

Objectives: Students will...

1. Be able to name the general storyline events in the NT and place events in correct sequence.
2. Understand that NT tells story of the Body of Christ beyond the person of Jesus and how we are included in that.
3. Talk about their everyday life story (individual and/or family story) and where God is there.
4. Discern action for themselves out of their new understandings of God's story and their story.

Supplies:

- 12 (or so) yards of felt
- felt square for each NT Event
- wall or board to put up storyline
- Basic Bible Curriculum like those found in *Here We Stand*ⁱ or *Faith Inkubators*ⁱⁱ - or write your own!

Making the Storyline:

Represent the Storyline on a very large felt board created with twelve yards of felt fabric, drawing a line down the middle, lengthwise, with numbered hashmarks. We hung this on a moveable room divider that was similar to a cork board, or you could hang it on a wall. Create a felt icon for each event you desire to represent on the storyline, coordinated with each numbered hashmark. Find Storyline icon ideas in the separate document resource.

Using the Storyline:

We used this tool at the beginning of each large group learning session to review the various stories about which we had already learned and which one we would address for that lesson. In this way, the storyline served as an organizing tool for both our time together as well as our learning goals.

What do I teach?

The format of the unit included both a large and small group time, basically following the pattern of the Here We Stand (HWS; also similar to Faith Inkubators) curriculum, including their suggestions for building small group relationships and cohesion. The content of the large group teaching time was from their "New Testament Year" in the "Three Year Scope and Sequence." In large group a bible story was taught and the small group reflected on the same concepts. I would begin

by choosing the NT events I thought were important and reflecting theologically on the connections between the Bible story and the lives of the youth I was teaching to determine some idea of what personal Faith story I would be looking to share (my own or someone else's; definitely not always my own!- Boring!)

In each large group use Anne Streaty Wimberly's Storylinking processⁱⁱⁱ, modified:

1. share a Faith story (my own or ask someone to come in)
2. reflect with the group on story (you or the group get to determine the "lesson" or learning goal for the session, I'd suggest having some ideas ready)^{iv}
3. find connections between the faith story and youth's experiences
4. share a Bible story
5. reflect with the group on the story centered around the same concepts
6. draw connections between the personal and Bible story.

The lesson then breaks into small groups for further reflection on the stories and the final step, to discern God's call for concrete actions. These ideas may not be actionable immediately, but will be the beginning of the discernment process over the entire curriculum unit.

Things to consider:

- A "pretest" to determine what level of knowledge the students already possessed about the storyline of the New Testament or Jesus' life. Possibly something collective like a "Jeopardy-style" game.
- Safety, particularly in small groups, can youth share their own experiences freely?
- Do we need to start with more basic skills around finding books in the bible? Can that be interwoven or does it need to be a separate lesson? What other basic skills might be necessary?
- A particularly important aspect of learning will be to

connect the generations: how can we get buy-in from parents to participate? To share stories that may or may not be faith related, but are definitely identity building.

- Small Group Guides would likely need some training of how to help draw out storylinks in the small group time. I would include in the training a facilitation of storylinking with their own stories. It would also be important to gain a clear understanding of the learning goals- we're not just here to get content comprehension! Some guides would also need training to ensure incorporation of the personally stories into the Bible story, rather than dwelling only in the relationships without helping youth connect the God story to their own.

A Word about Goals and Assessment:

One idea about how to assess students learning of both the content of the New Testament storyline as well as the connection between their story and God's story:

Youth create a poster that visually represents one or more events of the New Testament and how this event relates to their own life story. Youth could share these posters in their group, explaining the significance represented. We definitely need to enlist the help of small group guides for this assessment. Their observations will be key for how youth evidence these types of connection in their language.

Another assessment might include the process of discerning action. The action possibilities that small groups create out of their storylinking may be telling about their abilities to connect the Biblical stories with their stories.

Where this Unit Idea came from:

In [Soul Stories: African American Christian Education](#) Anne Streaty Wimberly defines religious education as the connection between individual human stories and God's stories. Wimberly also connects these two story perspectives with a third source of stories, the cultural heritage of African Americans as a collective body.

As I learned from Wimberly, I realized that her basic process of "story-linking" could be contextualized to all human communities. I am grateful to have read Wimberly's book as a resource for first, any African American communities and I recognize that it is secondarily to Wimberly's work that those of us who are not African American can also learn from the making the connections between "my story" and God's story. I would argue that congregations with a majority of white members also have a deep need for this connection.

According to Wimberly, story-linking facilitates a particular empowering identity for African Americans. Liberating wisdom and hope-building vocation are the goals of Christian education in Wimberly's book.^v These goals towards empowerment for participants are worthy goals in white settings as well.^{vi}

There would be at least two ways I can envision this translation occurring from an African American setting to a white setting. One would be addressing the empowerment needs of white participants to work on behalf of justice is needed in white settings with sensitivity to historical issues. It is necessary to embed this process on systemic levels, particularly in all the Christian Educators participating in the Learning Unit. Another way that one could focus the goal of empowerment and liberation in a white setting is through the particular needs for empowerment of the participants that are likely outside the realm of race relations. Often when working with young people, they need empowerment and space to speak to the larger church. Furthermore, the many ways in which youth may have experienced oppression as females, poor, bullying, etc. These are ways that will likely come up if youth are given the space to share their everyday life

experience, as Wimberly advocates. The difficulties of youth may or may not be related to systemic oppression, but all youth are likely to need empowerment to grow into the kind of health and wholeness that brings liberation and hopeful vocation.^{vii}

Kirsten Nelson Roenfeldt
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ⁱ This "Storyline Storylinking" learning unit was first created in the context of a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The curriculum was created using content from the *Here We Stand* curriculum published online by Augsburg Fortress. Purchase license for online curriculum here: <http://store.augsburgfortress.org/store/productfamily/127/Here-We-Stand-Confirmation>

ⁱⁱ Purchase license for Faith Inkubators at: <http://www.faithink.com/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Wimberly, Anne Streaty. 2005. *Soul stories: African American Christian education*. Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 2005.

^{iv} Use Wimberly's cues for reflection on one of her core areas: Identity, social contexts, interpersonal relationships, life events, life meanings, our unfolding story plot. p. 27ff.

^v Wimberly, p. 25

^{vi} However, it would be key for the facilitator to be aware of the differences in cultural power position of whites and to be sensitive to the different growth needs white people have when it comes to liberation, hope and justice.

^{vii} While youth's issues are pressing and incredibly important for the continued shaping of our American culture towards health, I want to be very clear that I am not equating the type of systemic and historical liberation Wimberly seeks for African Americans to the youth's needs of today.