



Weaving God's Promises

LESSON 12 Ezekiel Gives Hope

If you want to tell all of the stories, you will need to divide this lesson into several class sessions.

Summary of Today's Story

Ezekiel describes his vision, famous as the *Valley of Dry Bones*. In this vision, he is taken to a valley full of bones and the Lord commands him to say to the bones, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord."

As Ezekiel prophesies to the bones, they begin to come together, but without breath. When he prophesies to the breath, the bones come alive in a vast multitude.

God tells the prophet that these bones are the whole house of Israel and that God will put God's spirit into the people of Israel and they shall live. Israel will become a nation again.

Other stories tell how Ezekiel is told by God to do some strange things to demonstrate to the people of Israel what will become of them. These visions take place just before Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed, just before the first group of inhabitants is deported to Babylon, Ezekiel being one of them.

Where You'll Find Today's Story

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

Ezekiel 37:1-14

For stories about Ezekiel the prophet and the nature of his prophetic activity, see also:

Ezekiel 3:1-11 (God tells Ezekiel to eat a scroll.)

Ezekiel 4:1-3 (Ezekiel is told to use a brick to signify Jerusalem under siege)

Ezekiel 4:4-8 (Ezekiel is told to lie on one side for 390 days then on his other side for 40 days)

Ezekiel 4:9-17 (Ezekiel is given an eating pattern to symbolize Israel)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

The Valley of Dry Bones is read in church on the following Sundays:

Year A: Fifth Sunday in Lent

Year A: Day of Pentecost

Year B: Day of Pentecost

Year C: Day of Pentecost

It is also one of the readings for the Great Vigil of Easter.



Weaving Our Story with the Biblical Story

Ezekiel is thought to have been part of the first group of people to be taken out of his land and sent to Babylon for exile.

During the stormy and confusing days before Jerusalem is taken and destroyed, Ezekiel is given a series of visions by God. In these visions, he sees that the glory of God leaves Jerusalem just before its fall. This will explain to the people why the Temple was allowed to be destroyed—because God is no longer there (Ezekiel 10). He is also told to warn the people of the impending doom of the city and its people, God's punishment because “all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart” (Ezekiel 3:7). Later, God, through Ezekiel, will tell the people that God will give them a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezekiel 36:26). But first the people will be sent into exile.

During the Exile, which lasted for around 50-60 years, Ezekiel shares his visions of hope for the people of Israel, who may have begun to doubt whether they were still God's people.

If we put ourselves in the place of the exiles—like good storytellers—we can easily imagine the feelings of despair at their circumstances, longing for their beloved homeland, grief at losing their homes, devastation at the destruction of their city and their Temple, and maybe even guilt because the Exile was seen as punishment for their faithlessness and evil ways. They have been exiled to the capital of an evil empire and they know that their land will go to ruin without their care.

In the depth of their despair, Ezekiel prophesies that Israel will eventually live again, that the people will be made whole with God's spirit breathed into them. The Valley of Dry Bones vision is a beautiful

image of the promise of new life that God gives them during this dark time.

This is one of the nine readings that may be read at the Great Vigil of Easter, promising as it does new life and new hope for us, which we experience in the coming of Jesus Christ and in his death and resurrection.

If the Valley of Dry Bones story is used as a lesson, you should try to put the vision in the context of the people's sins of faithlessness and their subsequent defeat, their exile in the past, their return to their homeland, and then Jesus' coming to reconcile them with God in the future (around 300 years later).

As Ezekiel prepares his people to return home, we can see how we can prepare to return to God from our own Fall.

Because this is the last lesson before Advent and our preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ, we suggest that you tell about how the exile ends.

King Cyrus the Great of Persia, upon overtaking Babylonia, decides to rule by allowing the people to return to their own land under limited sovereignty. They are also allowed to worship as they please. So the Israelites come back to their Promised Land, but now it is a desolate homeland.

The Israelites need to rebuild—their homes, their lands, their towns and, above all, their Temple, which has been destroyed. They are discouraged, but Ezra the priest and Nehemiah, who is appointed governor of the region, lead the people in the restoration project. Ezra reads the Law and leads the way for renewed faithfulness to the Law of God by the people. He jolts their memory of what God asks of them: to be a holy people, the chosen people of God.

This story reminds us that *God stays with us, no matter what.*



The Episcopal Thread

The vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is such an image of hope for restoration of God's people that it is one of the readings in the Liturgy of the Word at the Great Vigil of Easter.

As strange as Ezekiel was, we as Episcopalians may be able to relate to him, for ours is an intuitive faith more than an intellectual one. We use symbols as much as words. We balance the word of God with the drama of the Holy Eucharist in our service.

Our rites make much use of symbol and we see our sacraments as the “outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace” (Catechism, p. 857, *The Book of common Prayer*).



Weaving God's Beloved Community

You are not dead; these bones shall live. The people have lost their homeland, their holy city, and their homes. Everything they possessed was taken away from them. And yet, God gives them hope that their future will be bright again.

Many people in our world, our country, and even our neighborhoods live without basic necessities in life. Many people are homeless, or hungry, or without livelihood, and struggle to see a way out of their hopelessness. Jesus would ask us to be empathetic—know what it's like in their shoes, learn how they feel, have mercy for the “other.” In a Beloved Community, empathy towards others keeps the community together.

Topics that can be discussed with children:

When you are sad, you sometimes want your family or friends to know how you feel, maybe so they

can comfort or help you. When you see somebody else who looks or is feeling sad, what can you say to them that you would like said to you if you felt the same way?

When you are feeling sad, what comforts you—somebody to talk to, a hug, a treat of some kind?



Gathering

As children enter the classroom, engage them in a simple activity related to

the lesson.

For the younger children, a building activity would be especially appropriate for today's lesson. Provide blocks, sugar cubes, toothpicks and marshmallows or play dough. This will help get the children's attention focused on the theme of building.

For older children, you might provide word games or puzzles. (You'll find an online resource for creating puzzles on page 2 in the Appendix, also found on the Website.) Or you might simply let the children enjoy a brief time of fellowship when they can visit with each other and catch up with their peers on what they have been doing for the past week. Relationships are an important dimension of Christian formation, so a few minutes of visiting will enrich their spiritual development.

After all the children have arrived and had a few minutes of activity or fellowship time, gather them together and say a simple opening prayer, for example:

- Lord God, you comfort us when we need help, you encourage us when we are discouraged, you help us through hard times. Stay with us, we pray, wherever we go, and especially be with us here as we hear your stories. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. *Amen.*



Telling the Story

You may wish to preface today's story with the context in which Ezekiel has his vision: the Exile and then the end of the Exile, along with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Read aloud today's story from a children's Bible, showing the pictures, tell the story in your own words, or read from the version of the story we provide, found on pages 8-12.

To bring the story to life for the children use a few story aids, such as a flannel board with felt or paper bones. Other suggestions can be found on page 2 in the Appendix, also found on the Website.

If you choose to read the stories of Ezekiel's activities as a prophet, have the children act out Ezekiel's actions as you read the stories. For example, provide some "bricks" and chalk or markers so they can "build" or draw Jerusalem as you read that part of the story. Have the children lie on their right side, then on their left as you read that part of the story.

You may need to edit the story about eating (Ezekiel 4:9-15); the children may find it gross! Or use Ezekiel 5:1-4 instead, telling how Ezekiel is instructed to cut his hair and beard.

At this time you do not need to explain or discuss the story. This is the time for children to hear the story. For now, simply let them absorb it in their heads and in their hearts. Later, while having snacks, you can bring up the story again and invite the children to talk about it.



Prayer

Set up a small worship center in your classroom.

Materials

- small table with a cloth to cover it
- 2 candles or a single large Christ candle
- matches
- Bible
- cross
- optional:* flowers (real, fake or handmade by the children)

Have the children set up a simple altar with the materials listed above. Invite them to place on the altar any drawings or crafts that they created during Gathering time. Then light the candles.

Read one or two verses from today's scripture to help the children connect the story that they just heard with the Bible. If working with older children, you might expand the reading to several verses.

Suggestions for the reading:

For younger children: Ezekiel 37:1-2

For older children: The entire passage, Ezekiel 37:1-14

Help familiarize the children with our liturgy by doing the reading as it is done in church. Read as follows:

Reader: A reading from the book of Ezekiel:
(*Read the selected passage.*)

Reader: The word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Invite the children to sit in a circle and join in prayer. Say a brief prayer yourself then invite prayers from each child in the circle:

- Ask for prayers of thanksgiving for God's grace in our lives during the past week. It is important for the children to recognize how God acts in our own lives on a daily basis.
- Welcome petitionary prayers for themselves or for others. Ask children if there is anybody who needs our special prayers for God's guidance and blessing. If needed, suggest some of the people who may need special prayers for God's presence: someone who may be sick, someone who is struggling or unhappy with something, people who are hungry and poor.
- Ask if anyone has had a birthday or celebrated a special day during the past week and give thanks for these special occasions.
- End the prayer time by praying together the Lord's Prayer.

Carefully extinguish the candles.



Sharing

Pass out snacks and say a simple grace, such as:

- Be present at our table, Lord,
Be here and everywhere adored.
Thy creatures bless,
And grant that we
may feast in Paradise with thee. *Amen.*

— words by John Cennick, 1741

or

- For the food that is set before us, and for those hands which prepared it, let us give thanks to God, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

This is a good time, while sharing a snack, to bring up Ezekiel's vision. Remember that this is a story of hope, not of despair. The dry bones come to life! This is Ezekiel's version of our theme of God's constant presence in our lives, no matter what happens and what we do.

Encourage the children also to think about Ezekiel as a prophet and what God kept telling him to do. Ezekiel must have been courageous and self-confident to do such strange things, for God and for the people of Israel! Ask:

- What would we be willing to do for our Lord?
- How would we know that the commands that we receive do indeed come from God?
- How do you think Ezekiel knew?



Activities: Arts, Crafts, Games, Drama, etc.

After the Sharing, begin an activity to supplement and enhance today's story. While the children are doing an activity, talk about the story so that they make the connection.

Suggested story-related activities are provided at the end of this lesson. In addition, an obvious fun activity for this lesson would be to have the children sing the famous song "Dem Bones" (*The foot bone is connected to the... ankle bone, the ankle bone is connected to the... leg bone*). All children love singing this song and acting it out.

Additional activity ideas can be found on pages 3-6 in the Appendix where we've provided suggestions and directions for a variety of general activities that can be adapted to any lesson. Also included are outreach and service projects that can be done at any time.



THREADS Take-Home Paper

At the end of this lesson you will find a two-page take-home paper for families called *Threads*. *Threads* provides parents with a briefer version of the information on scripture and Episcopal faith found in the introduction to the lesson, as well as multiple suggestions for household activities and prayer. Parents can use *Threads* to continue each child's classroom experience at home throughout the week. We suggest duplicating and distributing these two pages to children and/or their parents at the end of each lesson.

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS WEEK'S SESSION

Lined area for writing activities, consisting of 16 horizontal lines.



Memorization

If you haven't already, ask the older children to memorize the Lord's

Prayer. Also, ask them to memorize the Nicene Creed.



Weaving Our Faith

Before the closing prayer, help the children weave today's lesson together with their life experiences and their own thoughts and ideas by

asking the questions such as:

- Who did we talk about today?
- What happened to him?
- How was God present in this story?
- What was God like?
- What did we learn today?

To help children remember today's story, remind them of these key words or phrases:

- *prophet*
- *Dry Bones*
- *hope*
- *vision*
- *death and life*



Closing Prayer

Before the children leave, say a closing prayer to send them into the church worship service or

back to their homes in the knowledge of God's love and protection. The prayer can be very simple and straightforward, such as this one:

- O Lord God, Ezekiel saw that you breathe your spirit into your people to give them life. Breathe your spirit into us every single day, so that we can do your will wherever we go, and so that we may then spread your spirit to others who do not know you. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

End the class with a dismissal that is used in church, such as:

- Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

The children respond:

- Thanks be to God!



Weaving God's Promises

EZEKIEL 3:1-11; 4:1-3; 4:4-8; 4:9-17 AND ESPECIALLY 37:1-14

Note to teachers:

The main story for this lesson is Ezekiel's famous vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. This story is told last in the series of stories below, because it comes last in the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel's earlier visions are visions of doom and misery, of the punishment of Israel and Judah for abandoning God. The vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is different; it is a vision of hope, that God has not abandoned the people. Even though their land has been destroyed and they are taken away, God is still with them and will raise them up out of their sadness and give the land back to them. For younger children, it is recommended that you tell only the story of the Valley of Dry Bones. Older children can hear and understand the other stories and will enjoy them.

When people are sad, God sends Ezekiel

God's people are not living in Israel or in Judah anymore. They were taken away from their home and now they have to live in a foreign country called Babylon. Babylon is far away. And God does not rule in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar is king of Babylon, and he does not worship God.

So the people are very sad. They are afraid they will never see God again. And they are afraid they will always have to live in Babylon and will never go back to their homeland again.

But there is a man named Ezekiel among them. When the people were taken away to Babylon, he went with them. He is a priest. While walking toward Babylon, Ezekiel looks around and sees how sad his people are. But he also knows that God is with them, no matter what.

Here is the story of Ezekiel and how he gives hope to the people.

God gives Ezekiel something strange to eat

Ezekiel is a strange person. God chooses him to talk to the people and to warn them that their land will be destroyed. Later God will choose him to talk

to the people and tell them that God will save them and bring them back to that land.

One day, as Ezekiel sits by the river Chebar, just before the army comes to attack Jerusalem, he sees pictures of God.

He falls on his face, because you don't want to look at God. When he looks up, there is a hand in front of him—just a hand, with no body! The hand is holding out a scroll with words on it. When Ezekiel looks at the words, he can see that the words are words of sadness.

God says to Ezekiel, “Here’s what I want you to do. Eat this scroll.”

Ezekiel says, “What?”

God says, “Yes, eat this scroll.”

So Ezekiel opens his mouth, and the hand puts the scroll into his mouth. Ezekiel closes his mouth and chews it up. It is sweet, like honey.

Then God says, “Now you have the words in your mouth and in your stomach. Go to my people and speak the words to them. The words say that Judah and Jerusalem are gone because the people have sinned against me and not followed me. Even though I have been with them, they have not been with me. I will shut your mouth if you try to say anything but what I have given you to say.”

God gives Ezekiel a brick

God tells Ezekiel to find a brick. Ezekiel looks around and sees a brick sitting on the side of the street. He puts it in front of him. “Here is the brick you want me to find, God.”

God says, “Draw a picture of Jerusalem on one side of the brick.” So Ezekiel draws a city that looks like the city Jerusalem.

The God says, “Now put that brick down on the ground and put a bunch of stuff around it. Pretend the brick is Jerusalem and that it is going to be attacked. Put a pretend wall against the brick. This is like the wall that the people build

outside the city to protect it against the army. Then put a ramp against the brick, and put little tents all around the outside of the little city.”

So Ezekiel does what God tells him. People stop and stare. Ezekiel is making a pretend little city that is being attacked by pretend little armies.

Then Ezekiel finds an iron plate. He puts that plate against the brick, like a wall. God tells him that this plate shows how the city will be closed up when the army comes. No one can go in, and no one can come out. This is what will happen to Jerusalem when the Babylonian army comes soon.

Ezekiel lies on his side

This time, Ezekiel himself will be the story. God tells Ezekiel, “Lie on your left side for 390 days.”

Ezekiel says, “God, that’s a long time.”

God says, “It is a long time. But that’s just days. Think about 390 *years*. That’s how long Israel will be punished. But not only that. After your 390 days of lying on your left side, I want you to lie down on your *right* side, for 40 days. This is for the 40 years that Judah will be punished. All this time, I want you to talk to the people and tell them how they will be punished for not staying with me, even though I have stayed with them.”

Ezekiel eats as if he is in a city in danger

God tells Ezekiel to eat as if he were in a city under siege, meaning that the army is outside the city and nothing can go in or come out. When a city is under siege, the people can’t go outside the city to get other people, clothes, weapons or even food and water. Sometimes the people in a besieged city will starve.

So God tells Ezekiel to show the people what will happen when Jerusalem is attacked. God says to Ezekiel, “Take a bunch of different grains and mix them all together—wheat and barley, beans and millet. Put them all into one jar and make bread out of the mixture.”

Ezekiel says to God, “But we never mix our grains up like that to make bread! We make wheat bread, or millet bread, or barley bread. I never heard of wheat-millet-barley-bean bread!”

God says, “That’s the point! When you start running out of food, you do what you need to do to eat! That is what will happen when the people are shut inside Jerusalem while the army is outside. Do this to show the people how hard it will be for them.”

Then God says, “Even when you make mixed-up bread, you will still run out of food to eat. I want you to show that people what it will be like to run out of food. You will eat a teeny bit of food when you wake up in the morning, then a tablespoon of food at noontime, and then another tablespoon when you go to bed. That is all the food you will eat during the day. When the army comes, it will be like that, because there will not be enough food.”

God says again, “There will not be much water, either. So while you are eating just a smidgeon of food, you will be drinking a smidgeon of water at the same time.”

Ezekiel groans. But he does as the Lord asks him to do, because it is important to tell the people what God is saying to them.

The Valley of Dry Bones coming alive

God takes Ezekiel to the middle of a valley. It is full of bones. There are thousands, millions of bones lying around. The bones were very dry, white and cracked by the sun. There sure were a lot of dead people here.

God says to Ezekiel, “Ezekiel, can these bones live?”

Ezekiel says, “I don’t know if these bones can be alive, God. But you know.”

God says, “I want you to talk to these bones. Say to the bones, ‘God says to you that you will live. God will give you breath, and muscles, and skin, and air, and you will live. You know this because God is God. Because I am God, I will always be with you.’”

So Ezekiel talks to the dry, dead bones lying on the ground. As he talks, suddenly he hears a noise, a loud noise. He hears sounds like rattles. Then he sees the bones coming together, bone to bone, until there are thousands of skeletons lying on the ground.

Then the skeletons start to grow muscles, then nerves, then skin. Now they look like people. But they are not breathing. There is no breath going in or coming out of them.

God then says, “You must talk to the breath. Say to the breath what I tell you to say.”

And God says, “O breath, come from the four winds. Breathe on these people who have been killed. Breathe on them so they can come alive.” When Ezekiel speaks these words, the people come alive and stand on their feet. They are like a vast army.

Then God tells Ezekiel, “These bones are like my people in Israel. The people are telling me, ‘We are like bones. Our bones are dried up. Our hope is dead. We have nothing. We don’t have our land, we don’t have any hope, and we don’t even know if we have you, God.’”

God tells his people, “You were like dead people who were buried in graves. But I will open up your graves, because you are not dead anymore but alive. And I will bring you back to your land Israel. When I open your graves and bring you out of them, I will put my spirit into you and give you life. You *will* live. You *will* go back to your own land. And I *will* always stay with you.”

Dry bones—living people!



Weaving God's Promises

SCROLL RELAY for Primary, Elementary

Ezekiel had to eat a scroll; in this relay game children play with it!

Materials:

- butcher paper
- string or ribbon
- masking tape or rope, or a way to divide the playing area

Preparation:

Cut the butcher paper into two 9" x 24" pieces and make a scroll for each team.

Directions:

Invite the children to play the Scroll Relay:

1. With masking tape, mark two starting lines about 20 feet apart.
2. Divide the group into two teams, then divide each team into two equal parts.
3. The two halves of each team stand in a line opposite each other behind the starting lines.
4. Give a scroll to the first player in each line on one side of the room. At your signal, each player with a scroll runs to the other half of the team, hands the scroll to the first person in line, runs around that half of the team and then back to where they started, going to the back of the line. The player needs to cross their own starting line before the player holding the scroll can begin to run.
5. Players continue passing the scrolls until the first player is back at the front of the line and has the scroll in hand. The first team to finish wins.



Weaving God's Promises

SCROLLS for Primary, Elementary

Children make scrolls on which they write the words from today's scripture.

Materials:

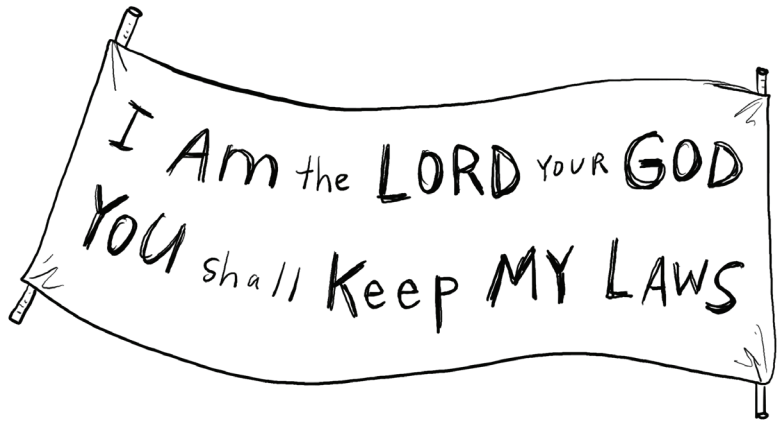
- butcher paper
- 2 dowel sticks per child
- tape
- ribbon
- scissors
- dry erase board or butcher paper
- black markers

Preparation:

Cut the butcher paper into about 9" x 24" pieces, one piece for each child.

On the dry erase board, write a verse from today's scripture or the following verse from Leviticus:

*I am the Lord your God
You shall keep my laws.*



Directions:

Hand out the pieces of butcher paper and invite each child to make a scroll. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Tape a dowel stick onto each end of the paper to make a scroll.
2. Copy one of the verses printed on the dry erase board onto your scroll.
4. Decorate or illustrate your scroll.
5. Roll up the scroll, then tie a ribbon around the middle.



Weaving God's Promises

SKELETON CARD GAME for Intermediate

Children, divided into two teams, compete to see who can first earn a complete set of skeleton bones by correctly answering questions.

Materials:

Skeleton Cards (p. 16),
index cards

Preparation:

Make two copies of the *Skeleton Cards* and glue them onto index cards (or simply print them on card stock or other heavy paper and cut them apart).

Directions:

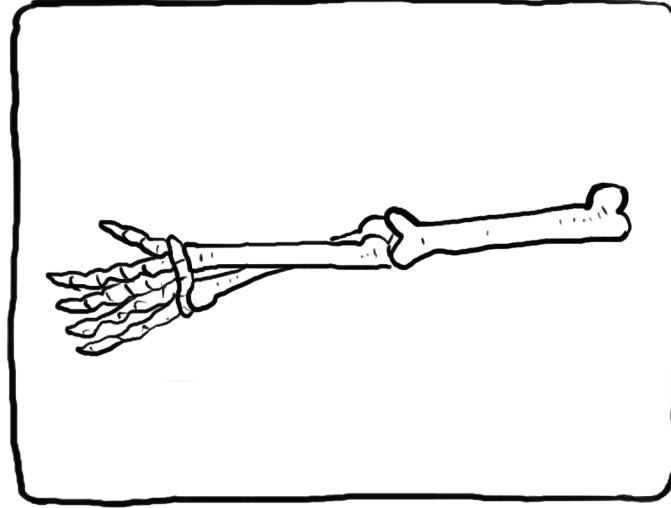
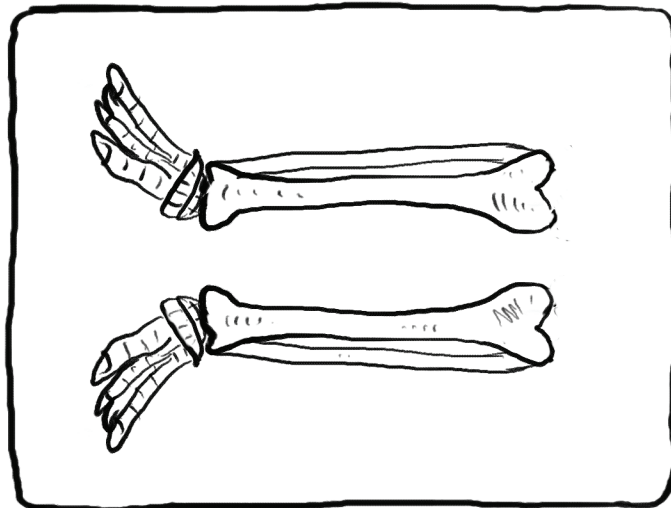
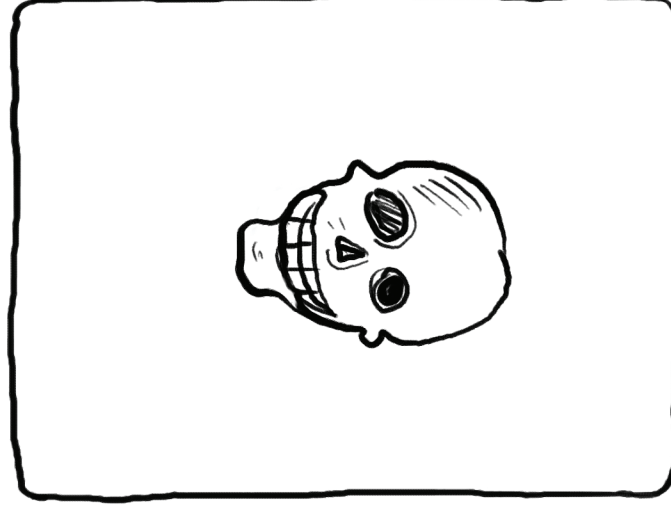
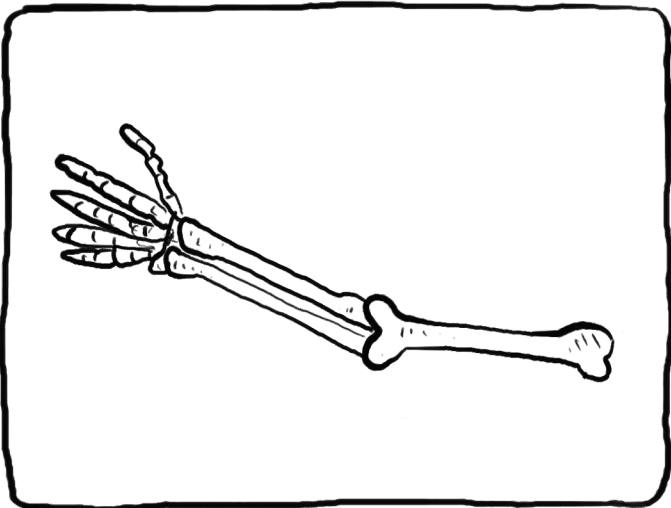
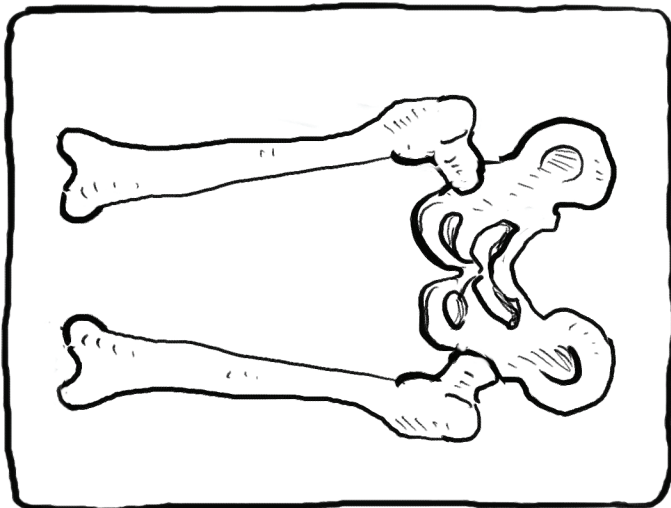
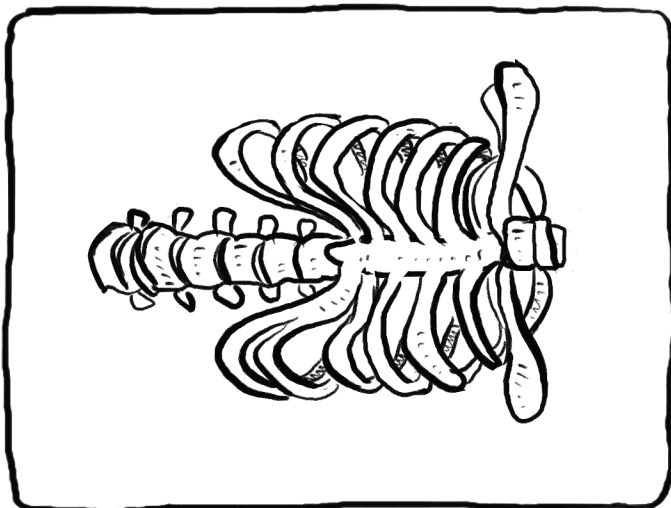
Invite the children to play the Skeleton Card Game:

1. Divide the class into two teams.
2. Ask questions about the reading. Whichever team answers a question correctly receives a card. The first team to have a complete skeleton wins the game.

Suggested questions:

- Whose vision was it?
- Where was he in this vision?
- What did he find there?
- What were the bones like?
- What did God ask Ezekiel?
- What did Ezekiel answer to God?
- And what did God respond?
- What did God do to the bones?
- What do the bones know after they come to life?
- How many bones were there?
- What do the bones represent?
- What made the rattling sound?
- What will God do for the people?
- What will the people know about God?

SKELETON CARDS





Weaving God's Promises

SKELETONS for Preschool, Primary

Children cut out paper bones and put them together with paper fasteners to create skeletons.

Materials:

Skeleton Bones Pattern (p. 18)
card stock or heavy paper
paper fasteners
scissors
paper punch
optional: crayons

Preparation:

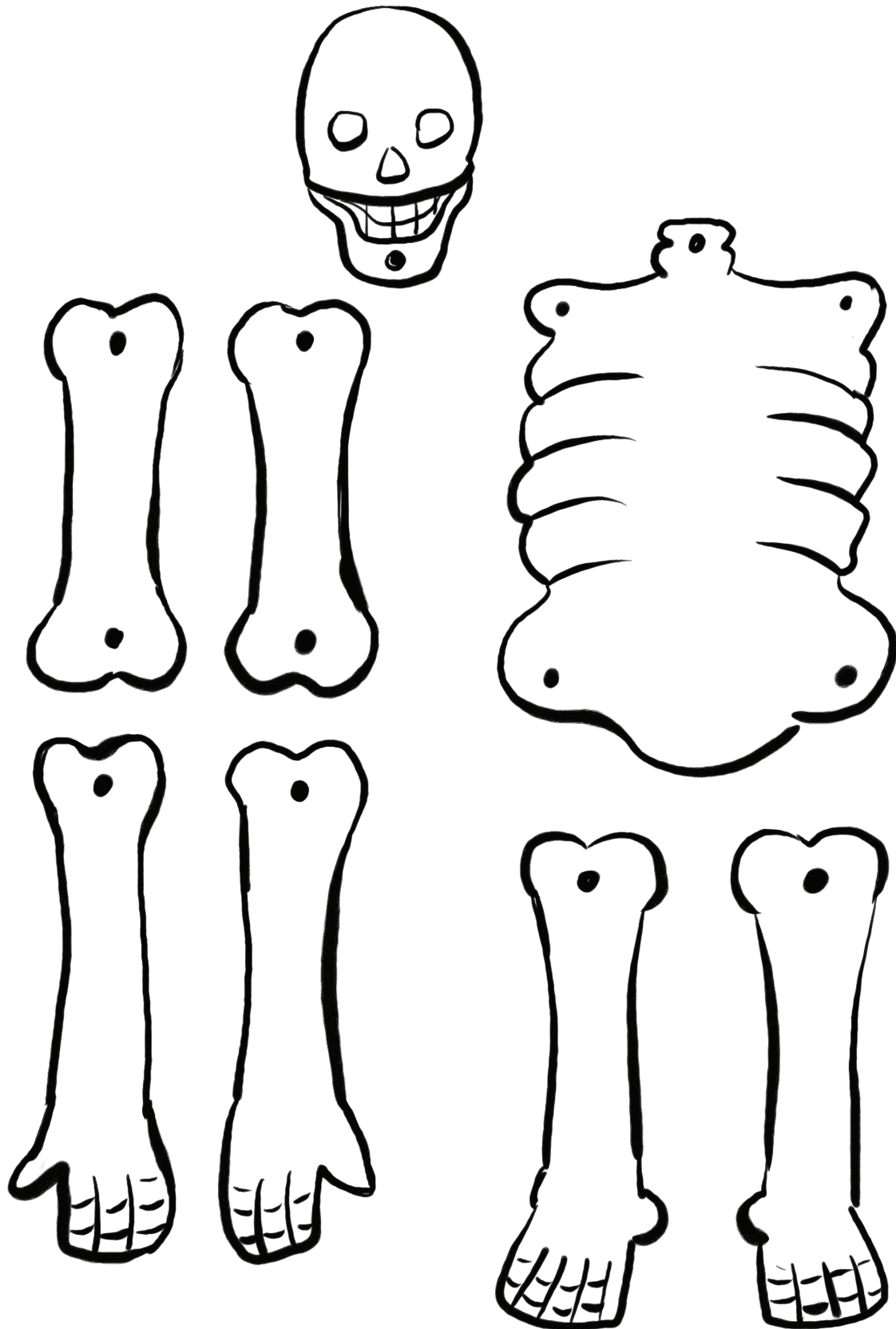
Copy the skeleton bones on heavy paper. Make one complete set of bones for each child.

Directions:

Hand out the copies of skeleton bones and invite each child to make a skeleton. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut out the skeleton bones.
2. Punch holes in the ends of the bones.
3. Push paper fasteners through the holes and attach the paper bones together.

SKELETON BONES PATTERN





Weaving God's Promises

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS for Preschool, Primary

Everyone praised the Lord when the Temple was finally rebuilt in Jerusalem. Children make musical instruments to help them praise the Lord in song and dance.

Directions:

Invite each child to make one of the instruments below. Help the younger children as needed.

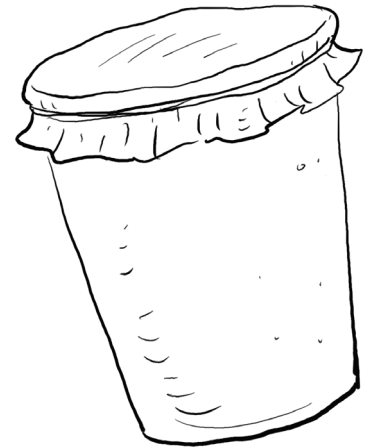
Bean shaker

Materials:

- white Styrofoam™ cup
- colorful permanent markers
- 6" diameter circle of fabric
- dried beans or popcorn kernels
- rubber band
- glue

Directions to the children:

1. Decorate the outside of a cup with markers.
2. Scoop beans into the cup to $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ full.
3. Put glue around the outside rim of the cup, place the fabric circle over the top of the cup and secure with a rubber band. Press the rim to make the fabric stick.



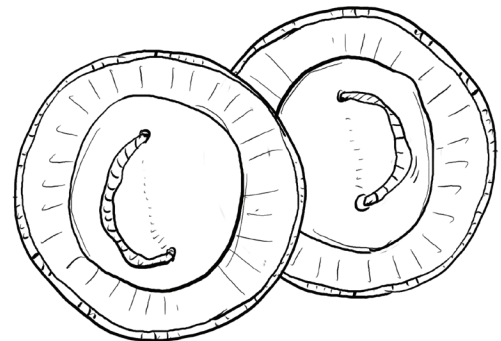
Cymbals

Materials:

- 2 aluminum pie plates
- 2 6" pieces of fat yarn
- large nail or scissors
- permanent markers in various colors

Directions to the children:

1. Decorate the outside of the pie plates with permanent markers.
2. Poke two holes in the center of the plates about 2" apart, using the nail or scissors.
3. Thread yarn through the holes and tie loosely, so that the handle will easily slip over your hand.



Drum

Materials:

- 3-lb. coffee can with lids
- 9" x 12" piece of construction paper
- crayons
- 24" piece of string or yarn
- sharpened pencil
- 2 unsharpened pencils
- tape or glue stick

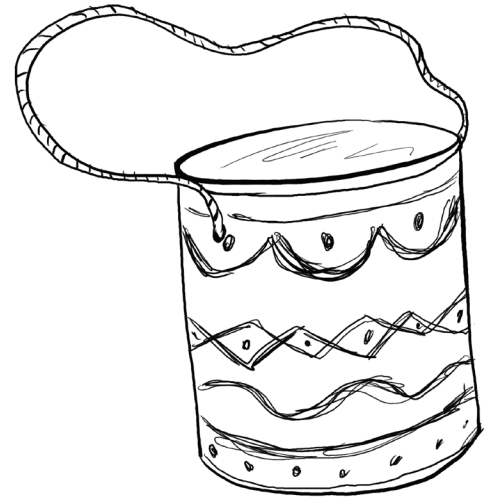
Preparation:

Punch two holes on opposite sides of the top of the can with a hammer and nail.

Directions to the children:

1. Decorate the construction paper with crayons then glue or tape it around the can.
2. With a sharpened pencil, poke holes in the paper to match the nail holes.
3. Thread the string through both holes of the can so the ends are on the outside, then put the lid on.
4. Tie the string together and slip over your head.

Give each child two unsharpened pencils to use for drumsticks.



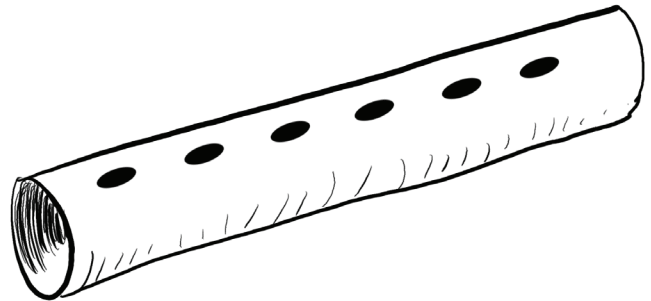
Flute

Materials:

- paper towel tube
- paints and paintbrushes
- black permanent marker

Directions to the children:

1. Paint the entire outside of a paper towel tube.
2. Draw in several "holes" with a black marker.





Weaving God's Promises

US BONES GAME for Primary, Elementary

Children, each assigned to be a *bone*, create a skeleton as you play or sing the song “Dem Bones.”

Materials:

recording of the song “Dem Bones” or a knowledge of the tune and the words

Directions:

Invite the children to play the Us Bones game:

1. Assign a *bone* part to each child: the *head bone*, the *neck bone*, etc.
2. As you play or sing the song “Dem Bones,” have each child connect to another as their *bone* is named. Try to have the children connect at the proper places! (They will need to lie down on the floor to do this.)
3. For variation, try singing the song faster and faster and watch the children scramble to get in place!



Weaving God's Promises

MAGNETIC SKELETONS for Preschool, Primary

Children add magnets to paper bones and build skeletons.

Materials:

Skeleton Bones Pattern (p. 23), printed on card stock or other heavy paper
thin magnetic strips or sheet, or button magnets
crayons or markers
scissors
glue, for nonadhesive magnets

Preparation:

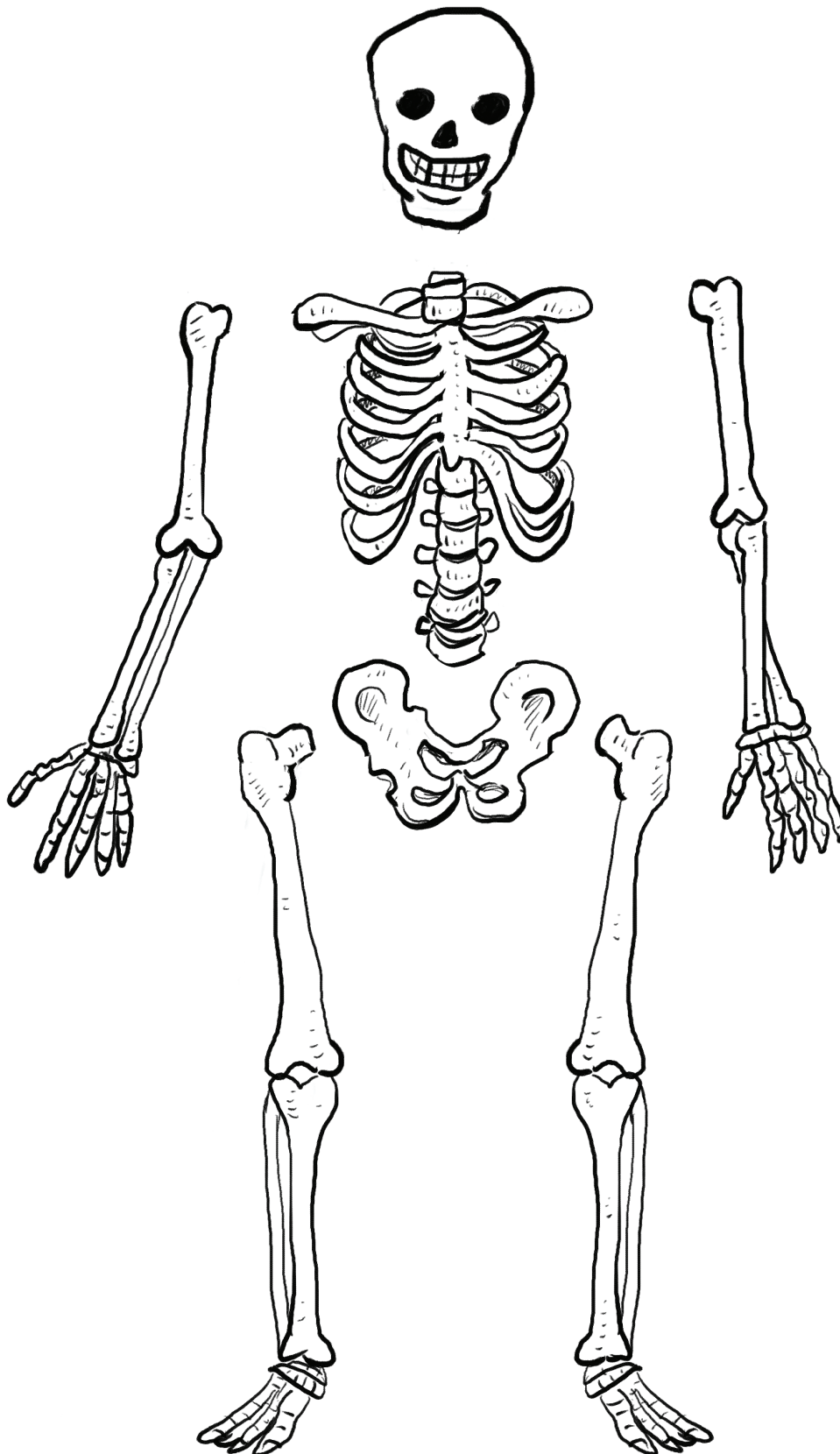
Make copies of the skeleton pattern, one copy per child. If possible, use card stock paper.

Directions:

Pass out the bone patterns and invite each child to make a skeleton. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut out the skeleton bones.
2. Stick button magnets or small pieces of magnetic strip on the ends of all the bones so they can be attached to each other.

SKELETON BONES PATTERN





Weaving God's Promises

BOUNCING SKELETONS for Preschool, Primary

Bones meet bones and then they live! Children make skeletons that bounce on rubber bands—like they are alive!

Materials:

toilet paper tube
beans
stapler
hole punch
scissors
brown construction paper, 9" x 12"
markers
glue
rubber bands

Preparation:

Cut a skull shape (for the basic shape, see skeleton bones pattern on pp. 18 and 23) and 4 1" x 9" strips out of brown construction paper, one set for each child.

Directions:

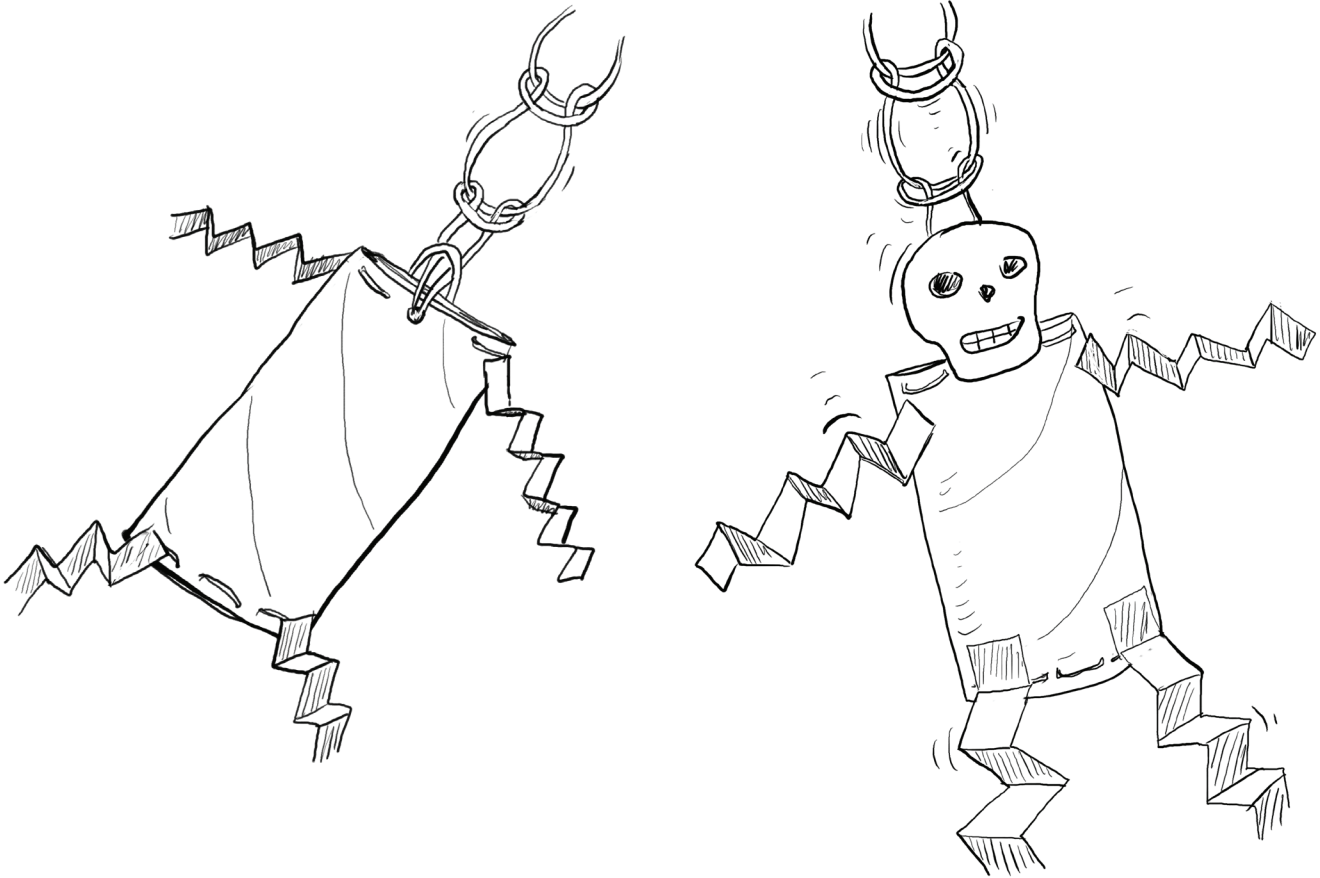
Hand out the skull shapes and brown strips of paper and invite each child to make a bouncing skeleton. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Pinch one end of a tube and staple it closed.
2. Put in a handful of beans. Then pinch the other end and staple that end closed.



3. Punch a hole at one end, right in the middle.
4. Fold the strips of brown paper accordion-style, then glue them onto the tube to make skeleton arms and legs.
5. Draw eyes and a mouth on the skull shape, then glue it onto the top of the tube.
6. Loop 2-4 rubber bands together (as shown in the illustration) then push one through the hole and tighten.

Invite the children to hold the rubber band and let their skeletons bounce with life!





Weaving God's Promises

BENDY SKELETONS for Preschool, Primary

Children make skeletons that bend.

Materials:

Skeleton Picture (p. 27)
unlined index cards
scissors
glue
twist ties

Preparation:

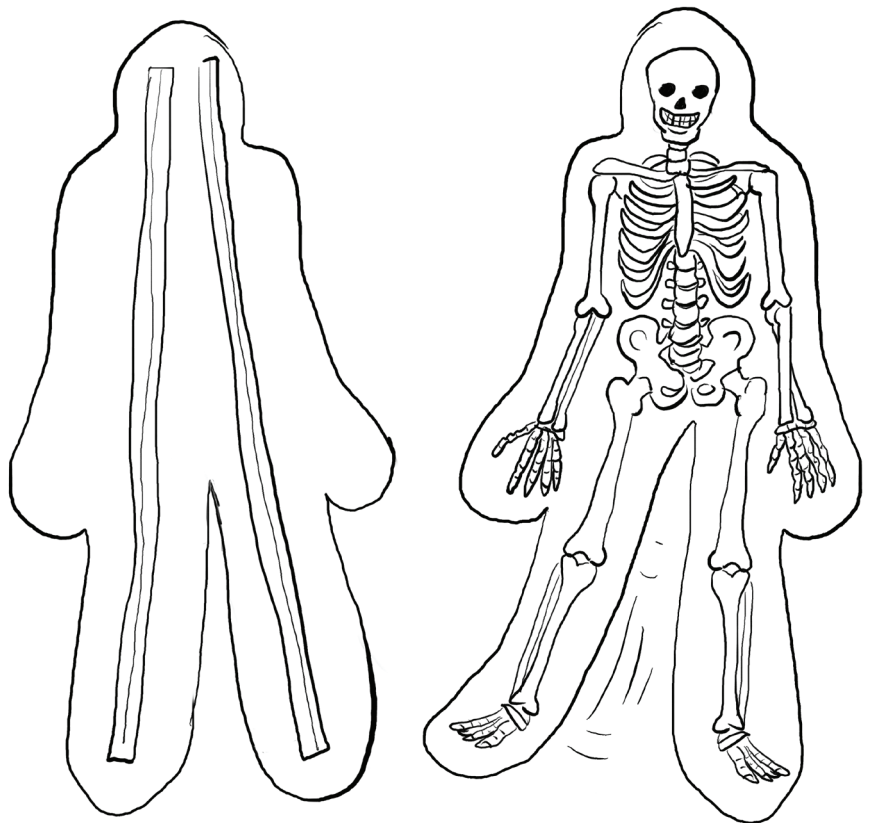
Make a copy of the *Skeleton Picture* for each child. Each child needs only one skeleton.

Directions:

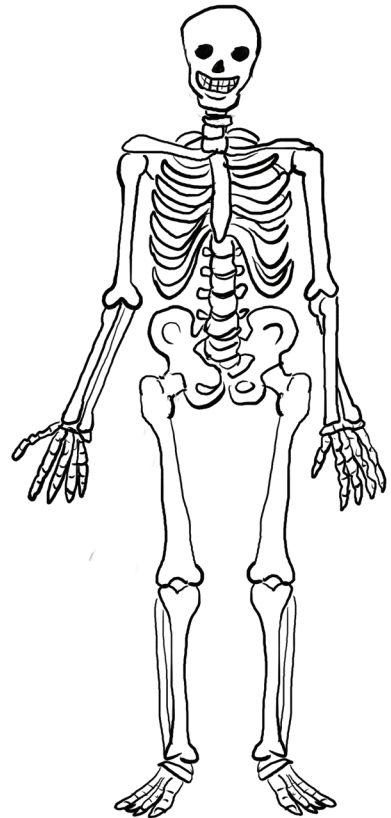
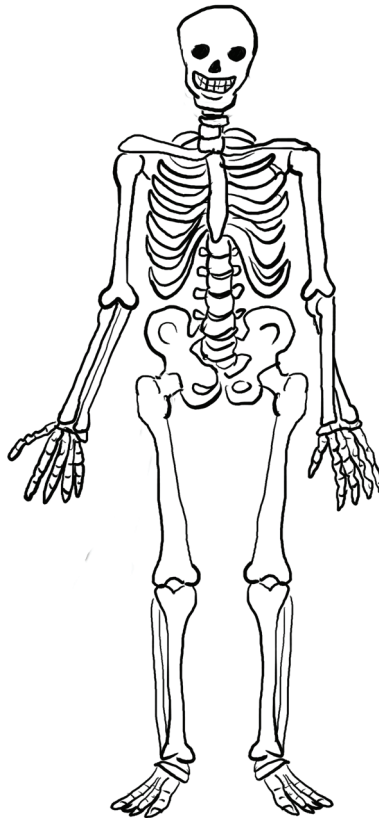
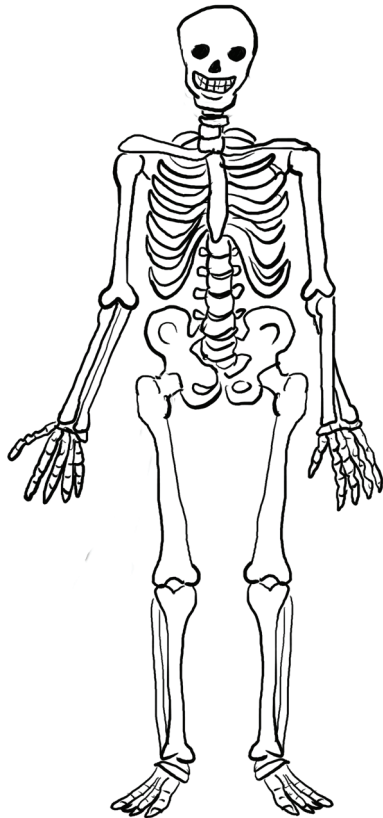
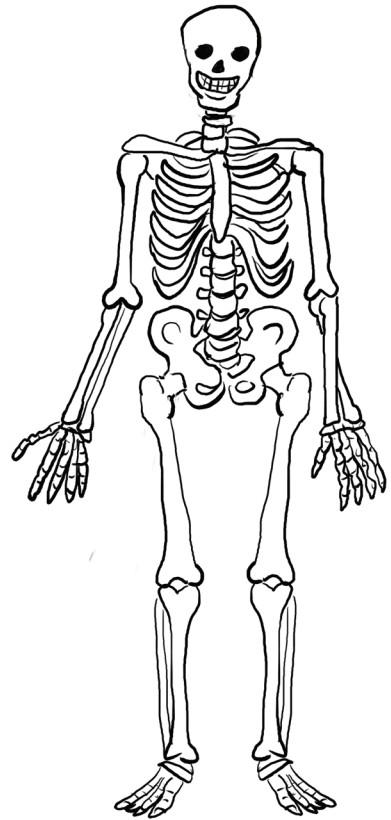
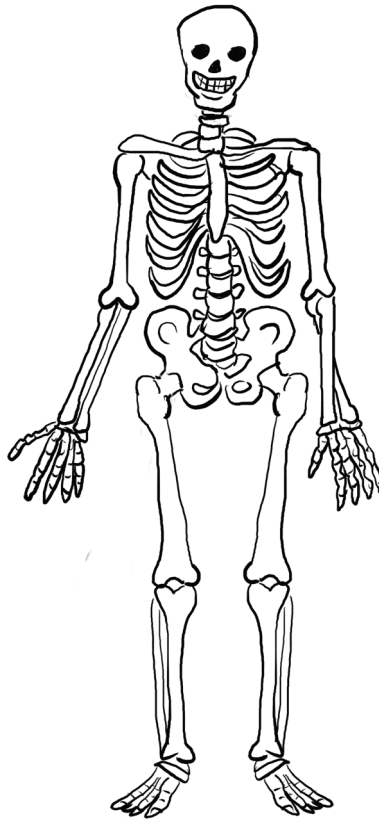
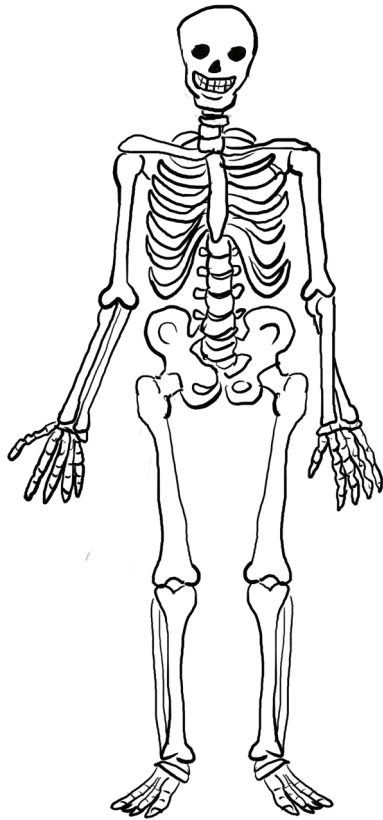
Hand out the *Skeleton Pictures* and invite each child to make a bendy skeleton. Help the younger children as needed.

Give the children these directions:

1. Cut out the skeleton picture and glue it onto an index card.
2. Cut out the picture.
3. Glue twist ties down the back of the skeleton picture (onto the index card). Let dry.
4. Bend the skeleton into different positions.



SKELETON PICTURE





Weaving God's Promises

PILE OF BONES for Primary, Elementary

Children make skeleton parts that hook together then put them in a pile and race to see who can put together a complete skeleton first!

Materials:

pipe cleaners
Skeleton Bones Pattern (on p. 18)
white construction paper
glue
scissors

Preparation:

Cut pipe cleaners into lengths of about 6". Make a copy of the *Skeleton Bones Pattern*, one for each child.

Directions:

Hand out the *Skeleton Bones Patterns* and invite each child to make a pile of bones. Help the younger children as needed. Give the children these directions:

1. Cut out the skeleton bones.
2. Tape a pipe cleaner onto the back of each bone, top to bottom, side to side or both. The pipe cleaner should stick out past the edges of the bone.
3. Glue the paper bones to a piece of construction paper, with the pipe cleaners in the middle. Cut away the construction paper along the edge of the bone.
4. Make a hook on the end of the pipe cleaners.
5. Use the pipe cleaners to hook your bones together to make a whole skeleton.

Invite the children to play a game, following these directions:

1. Put your bones in a pile in front of you.
2. At my signal, see who can put a skeleton together the fastest.



Weaving God's Promises

STRING ART for Intermediate

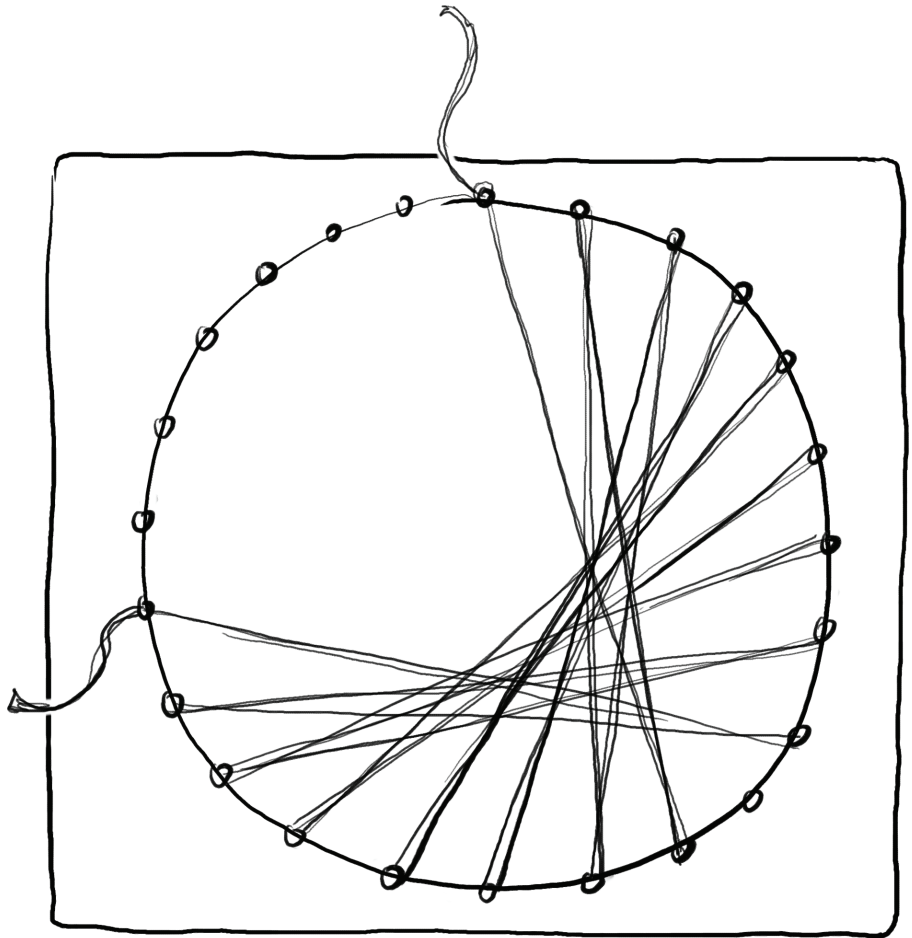
Children make designs on foam core by wrapping embroidery thread around push pins.

Materials:

- colorful embroidery thread
- clear push pins
- foam board
- scissors
- glue
- paper
- pencils

Preparation:

Cut the foam board into a 16" squares, one for each child.



Directions:

Distribute the pieces of foam board and invite each child to make a piece of string art. Give the children these directions:

1. On a piece of paper, outline a shape that represents hope, such as a circle, star or heart. It needs to be a closed shape with the beginning and end of the line meeting.
2. Place the paper on top of the foam board.
3. Poke push pins around the outline, about 1" apart. Do not push the pins all the way in yet. Then carefully tear away the paper.
4. Put a drop of glue under each push pin, then push it in all the way. This will secure the pins.
5. Wrap the end of the thread around one pin, then wrap it around the opposite pin (or the pin around 10 pins from the first one). Then go back to the pin next to the first pin (either to the right or to the left) and wrap the thread around that pin. Go to the pin to the right or the left of the second pin and wrap the thread around it.
6. Continue wrapping the thread around pins until you reach the first pin again. Then wrap the thread around the first pin several times and tie. Cut the thread.



Weaving God's Promises

YARN PRAYERS for Intermediate

The Israelites had to keep closely connected while they lived in exile away from their land. Their community kept them together in hope.

Children show their connection to each other in prayer, using a ball of yarn.

Materials:

ball of yarn

Directions:

Invite the children to join in a yarn prayer:

1. Everybody sits in a circle around the room. There must not be any tables or other furniture between the children.
2. One child holds the ball of yarn and says a prayer for something or someone.
3. The child then pulls out a long length of yarn and, holding the end, throws the ball of yarn to somebody else.
4. That person then offers a prayer, pulls out a long length of yarn and, holding onto the strand of yard, throws the ball to a third person, and so on.
5. When everyone has had a chance to offer a prayer, all say “Amen” and see how they are connected to God and to each other in their prayers.

— found in *One Hundred Graces*, selected by Marcia and Jack Kelly (NY: Bell Tower, 1992), p. 16.

LESSON 12: EZEKIEL GIVES HOPE



We Believe . . .

Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is such an image of hope for restoration that it is one of the readings in the Liturgy of the Word at the Great Vigil of Easter.

As strange as Ezekiel was, we as Episcopalians relate to him, for we use symbols as much as words. We balance the word of God with the drama of the Holy Eucharist. Our rites make much use of symbol and we see our sacraments as the "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace" (p. 857, *The Book of common Prayer*).



Today's Story:



Ezekiel 27:1-14

During the Exile, which lasted for around 50–60 years, Ezekiel shares his visions of hope for the people of Israel, who may have begun to doubt whether they were still God's people.

If we put ourselves in the place of the exiles—like good storytellers—we can easily imagine the feelings of despair at their circumstances, longing for their beloved homeland, grief at losing their homes, devastation at the destruction of their city and their Temple, and maybe even guilt because the Exile was seen as punishment for their faithlessness and evil ways. They have been exiled to the capital of an evil empire, and they know that their land will go to ruin without their care.

In the depth of their despair, Ezekiel prophesies that Israel will eventually live again, that the people will be made whole with God's spirit breathed into them. The Valley of Dry Bones vision is a beautiful image of the promise of new life that God gives them during this dark time.



Words of Faith

Prophet—a person who, like Ezekiel, brings God's words to people

Hope—the feeling that things will get better, that good things will come

Vision—like a dream, but you are awake, able to see things that could be; Ezekiel's vision was of dry bones coming together to become living, breathing people

This story reminds us that God stays with us, no matter what.



Sharing

You may wish to preface today's story with the context in which Ezekiel has his vision: the Exile and then the end of the Exile, along with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple. While the main story is found in Ezekiel 37:1-14, there are additional interesting stories about Ezekiel and the nature of his prophetic activity:

- **Ezekiel 3:1-11** (God tells Ezekiel to eat a scroll.)
- **Ezekiel 4:1-3** (Ezekiel is told to use a brick to signify Jerusalem under siege.)
- **Ezekiel 4:4-8** (Ezekiel is told to lie on one side for 390 days then on his other side for 40 days.)
- **Ezekiel 4:9-17** (Ezekiel is given an eating pattern to symbolize Israel.)

Reinforce the idea that God continually, constantly, ceaselessly provides hope and protection for God's people, then and now.



Weaving God's Promises

This Week at Home



- **Create your own valley of "dry bones."** Purchase a model of a human skeleton, preferably one you assemble yourself. (These are sold by hobby shops and stores that carry teacher, scientific and educational supplies; you'll also find them online.) Spread out the pieces and assemble the "dry bones." As you work, read aloud Ezekiel's vision of hope in Ezekiel 37:12-14. Talk about the meaning of Isaiah's vision for Israel and for us.
- **Put together a simple skeleton:** head, torso, two legs and two arms. This can be cut roughly out of paper...or even made out of vegetables (two bananas, two zucchini, a tomato and an eggplant!)...or some other materials. Play a game like Cooties, throwing dice to put your skeleton together one piece at a time.
- **Sing and play out the popular children's song "Dem Bones"** (also called "Dry Bones" and "Dem Dry Bones"). If you don't know this song, you can find it online at several websites, including these:
 - <http://ingeb.org/spiritua/demdrybo.html>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pYb8Wm6-QfA>
 - <http://www.kididdles.com/lyrics/d009.html>
- **Search our hymnals for hymns/songs of hope**, for example, in *The Hymnal 1982*, #680, "O God our help in ages past," or "#438, "Tell out, my soul." Either sing one or two of these together, or read the words aloud. Try writing a new verse for a favorite hymn, including lyrics that reflect the things *you* all hope for.
- **Provide hope.** How can you provide hope to someone who may feel hopeless right now? Could you visit them? bring them flowers or a food basket? run errands for them? listen to them share their sorrow? give hugs? clean their house? Together come up with a person and a plan, then follow through.
- **Brainstorm a "hope list."** List all the reasons to have hope in tough times, for example, "Look at our past—no matter how tough things get, they always have worked out before." Post these to remind you of reasons to hope.



Household Prayer

We thank you, Lord, for your prophet Ezekiel, who dreamed about bones and through his dream gave hope to his people. Give us dreams of hope also, that we may also be messengers of joy to others as Ezekiel was. And may we see you in all our dreams and hopes. *Amen.*

