

Dear Friends:

Welcome to the 2012 VBS Fair! For those of you who can't visit our display in Alexandria, Virginia, we are offering this information on the web. Be sure to watch our newest addition to the reviews, "Wisdom from the Field" videos on our welcome page at www.vts.edu/cmt.

We would like to call your attention to our "**Top Picks**." These merit serious consideration based on the following criteria:

- Theology: the love of God is emphasized more than the sinfulness of humans
- Unity: a distinctive theme is supported by a cohesive program of developmentally-appropriate stories and activities
- Inclusiveness: text and graphics represent all God's people with respect and stereotypes are avoided.

"**Perennial Picks**" are also on display in the exhibit area. Many of these programs have been on our "Top Picks" in previous years, and all are still being published and available for purchase. If your parish has not yet used them, we recommend you consider them for VBS or other kinds of programs, such as summer and Lenten series.

We understand that there may be other criteria that are important in your congregation and may lead you to choose a VBS program other than our "Top Picks" or "Perennial Picks." We look forward to learning how and why you choose the program that you do. Be sure to keep us informed!

Attached is a copy of the VBS review list. For each curriculum in the Fair, the list gives a brief description, some strengths and weaknesses, and publisher/price information.

Thank you for visiting us. Please complete the brief evaluation form before you leave to help us meet your future resource needs. Best wishes in planning a 2012 VBS!

In Christ,

The CMT Leadership Team

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VBS Reviews 2012

CMT Top Picks:

Adventures on Promise Island: Where Kids Discover God's Lifesaving Love!
No Friend Like Jesus: Get Connected!
Operation Overboard: Dare to Go Deep with God!
Take Me to the Water: God's Love Flows
Babylon: Daniels Courage in Captivity

Perennial Picks:

The Abundant Life Garden Project
Aslan is on the Move!
Clean Water for All God's Children
Dare to be Different
Festival of Faith
Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God
ReNew: The Parable of the Sower
Wild Willy's Candy Factory: A New Look at the Prodigal Son
Wizards and Wonders: A Hero's Journey with Harry Potter

Other Reviewed Programs:

Amazing Desert Journey
Amazing Wonders Aviation: Encountering God's Awesome Power
Go Fish! Praise! Where Kids Get Down and Lift God High
Praying all the Time: Using Children's Books to Explore Different Kinds of Prayer
Rock the World VBS 2012
Sky: Everything is Possible with God
SonRise National Park VBS: Point Your Kids to Jesus!
SPLASH in God's Word
Zapped

CMT TOP PICKS

Adventures on Promise Island: Where Kids Discover God’s Lifesaving Love!

Standard Publishing

800.543.1353

www.vacationbibleschool.com

Starter Kit: \$69.99

Promise Island, a 5-session Vacation Bible School program with a tropical island theme, focuses on God’s promises: “I am with you”, “I care about you”, “I give you what you need”, “I will save you” and “I will answer you”. Each session allows leaders to find a balance between activity and reflection for participants, providing opportunities for games, crafts, singing, drama and a service project. *Promise Island* also includes resources for event planning and actual teaching. With no additional cost, a church can launch its own website with marketing, volunteer recruitment and student registration pages. Music was written and performed by contemporary Christian music singer and songwriter YANCY.

Age Level:

Preschool (with separate guide)

Elementary

Teen programming

Adult Bible study

Includes:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Planning DVD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternative schedule
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD (2 in set)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Director Guide + 5 site leader guides

Strengths:

- While sin is mentioned, the message of God’s love is given prime importance.
- Memorization of Bible passages is encouraged.
- Scriptural lessons extend to adult Bible study allowing parents to engage with the material and share formation experiences with their child.
- Quick Start Guide gives clear directions on how to sort through the materials and get to what is needed quickly.
- Separate leaders’ guides for Bible stories, games, crafts/outreach, and snacks allow for easy delegation of roles.
- Music CDs by Yancy are lively and inviting
- Images and music videos are inclusive in their use of children from different culture and backgrounds

Weaknesses:

- Overemphasizes physical materials needed to support the program
- Expenses can quickly build; appears to be geared towards larger churches with ample budgets
- While developmental milestones of children are included, more useful examples would be helpful

Nina Baca

No Friend Like Jesus: Get Connected!

Abingdon Press

800.251.8591

abingdonpressvbs.com

Cost: \$74.99

No Friend Like Jesus: Get Connected! starts with the premise that people are all connected – to each other, to their families, to their communities, to their world, and best of all, to Jesus. The program emphasizes these themes through the use of social media, something that even preschoolers understand. Each day begins with a Bible story that is connected to a particular social networking term or action. In a culture where everyone is seemingly connected to everyone else, there is still the feeling of being distant from each other and from God. This VBS program instills the idea that people are always connected to God regardless of technology – from creation to eternity. This program is aimed primarily at African American churches.

Ages Levels:

Preschool (ages 4-5)

Teen – purchase separately

Elementary (younger & older)

Adult – purchase separately

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Director's Manual	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule

Strengths:

- Decorating is minimal – can be elaborate or simple
- African-American role model exemplifies daily story and ties it to the Black Tech Connection.
- Includes several scheduling options – traditional day-time, evening, day-long program, summer enrichment, weekend, even a one-day camp.
- Music is a eclectic mix of rap, hip/hop, jazz, and religious songs, available for download.
- Online resources include webinar, registration tools, and sharing with others users
- Daily meditation and prayer for leaders available.
- Bible leader guides include overview charts, responsibilities list, age level characteristics, and including children with disabilities.
- Three different translations of the scripture available: NRSV, NKJV, and CEB.
- The daily outreach component can be extended into the following year.

Weaknesses:

- Crafts are unexciting, but do use recycled materials for some: major prep-time required
- Not enough movement and physical activity other than music motions. Student booklets are mainly pen/paper busy work and not always developmentally appropriate.
- Snacks are very labor intensive – more meals than snacks. Would require a team in the kitchen preparing, cooking, and baking long before the participants arrive.

Kellee Wattenbarger

Operation Overboard: Dare to Go Deep with God!

Cokesbury/Abingdon Press

800.672.1789

<http://overboard.cokesburyvbs.com/>

\$89.99 (Smaller Church Starter Pack is \$59.99)

Operation Overboard: Dare to Go Deep with God challenges children to “dive deep into the water of God's Word and discover what it means to have deep faith.” As children don imaginary scuba gear and spend the week journeying down towards the oceans floor in an “underwater adventure” they will also delve into the Bible, meeting Biblical characters from both the Old and New Testaments who showed “deep” faith in God. Each session focuses on an “Ocean Insight:” Depend on God, Dare to Care, Claim Jesus, Choose to Follow, and Change the World. *Operation Overboard* strives to introduce children to a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ, inspiring them to bring alive the word of God in their lives. The rotation model offers a sequential view of the Bible, providing faith connections for everyone involved. The central goal for participants of all ages is to understand the meaning of their faith and how to share it with others.

Ages Levels: Preschool through Older Elementary

Youth and Adult study materials also available

Toddler materials can be downloaded from the website above

Includes:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Director's Manual	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD		

Strengths:

- Heavy emphasis on how much God loves us no matter what we do.
- Illustrations and photographs are inclusive and multi-racial.
- Mission stories highlight children who made a difference and focus on the ocean and clean water.
- Supports a custom church web site and registration.
- Interactive Bible stories and prayer.
- Life application activities connect the Bible stories and "ocean insights" to daily life.
- Sign language instructions are included for Bible verses.
- Offers a less expensive starter kit for small churches.
- Crafts time includes a “faith connection” to tie in projects with daily theme.
- Music is lively with lyrics that children will enjoy singing.

Weaknesses:

- Challenges children to tell everyone they know about Jesus, which has the potential to make some children feel uncomfortable.
- Costly add-on materials may be prohibitive to some churches.

Lori Daniels

Take Me to the Water: God's Love Flows

MennoMedia Faith & Life Resources, Mennonite Church

800.245.7894

www.MennoMedia.org/vbs

Cost: \$134.99

Take Me to the Water focuses on five Bible texts from both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament that use water to illustrate God's provision of life and blessing. The five-day program is designed to help children understand their faith as they explore the use of water during biblical times. The lessons acknowledge the importance of water in to life, but also emphasize that God is the source of life who sustains us today. The overall message of the curriculum is gentle and positive.

Children will also be exposed to water issues around the world today, although writers missed an opportunity to tie the biblical theme to combating water shortages throughout the world. An optional mission project raises money to provide clean water in Colombia through a program sponsored by the Mennonite Church. It is simply a place to send money, however, with little or no information about the people and water scarcity. After gathering and worship activities, children rotate through three stations: Bible, Creative Response (snacks are served here) and Active Response. A final group assembly concludes the day's activities.

Age Level:

Preschool (with separate guide)

Elementary and middle school (Grades 1-8)

Includes:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternative schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Online resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD		

Strengths:

- Good immersion into the daily Bible story. Crafts are appropriate to the text.
- Easy-to-use for volunteer who are not teachers.
- Little to purchase aside from the Starter Kit, a help for limited church budgets. Optional posters are \$4.49 each, and other materials can be accessed online.

Weaknesses:

- Most of the music is unremarkable, though easy to sing.
- Snack recipes do not seem sensitive to common allergies in young children.
- The age-span from first to eighth grade is quite wide, probably requiring supplemental activities for older children.

Joyce Walker

Babylon: Daniels Courage in Captivity

Group Publishing

800.447.1070

<http://group.com/childrens-ministry/vbs/babylon>

Cost: \$124.99

Babylon, the next generation of the Marketplace series, focuses on Daniel during his captivity in Babylon. The themes focus on God's presence through change, when you need help, when you are afraid or lonely, and when you are thankful. The overall emphasis of the program is staying true to God, just as Daniel and his friends refused to denounce God. Children and adults are challenged throughout the week to share their beliefs about God with shopkeepers in the Marketplace among others.

Participants are divided into tribes of Israel that rotate through worship, tribal time, and learning about Babylonian culture. Central to the program are the Marketplace Shops, where participants do craft projects (music instruments, jewelry, mosaic tiles, metalwork), learn about animals and plants of the time, and enjoy foods of the Middle East. Decorating, especially for the marketplace, can be very demanding and requires significant volunteer time. Online support for a parish VBS website and registration are available.

Ages Levels:

Intergenerational, but can be for elementary children only

Separate preschool resources

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Skits/Drama DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule		

Strengths:

- Volunteers well-supported with resource materials
- The marketplace series has a proven track record of being a varied, interesting program
- Music is engaging, supported with DVD tracks using multi-culture and multi-age singers. Music disks include lyrics and instrumental only versions.
- Mission project focuses on raising money for mosquito nets for Mali in Western Africa; participants are encouraged to send cards to net recipients and pray for them daily

Weaknesses:

- Although advertised as intergenerational, activities are targeted to children. Youth could provide valuable assistance in decorating the marketplace and co-leading tribes with adults.
- Snack suggestions are vague; instructions to the shopkeeper include grapes, dried fruit, cheeses, figs, olives, leavened and unleavened bread.
- Designing crafts to be made in the marketplace can be very time consuming unless pre-packaged kits are purchased, which may be costly.

Dorothy Linthicum

Perennial Picks

The Abundant Life Garden Project: A Program for Children of the Episcopal Church

Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD)

<http://www.er-d.org/children>

Free; available via download

The Abundant Life Garden Project is a five-session curriculum that focuses on the importance of *Water, Seeds, Soil, Animals, and Harvest*. Although each session is designed for a one-hour time period, additional activities are available in the appendices. Through this program children will learn Bible stories and participate in activities that reinforce each day's theme. Children will also explore stories from the Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) website that show the suffering and needs of people throughout the world

Ages Levels: Preschool to 12 years old

Includes:

—	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	—	Music Action Training DVD
—	Music CD	—	Director's DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedules		

Strengths:

- Emphasizes a loving God.
- Curriculum is free.
- Heavy emphasis on environmental concerns and encourages being good stewards of the world's resources.
- Calls attention to the suffering of those around the world and highlights ways that children can make a difference.
- Daily themes connect well with Biblical stories.
- Incorporates using a Litany of Thanks and meditation into daily activities.

Weaknesses:

- Lacks variety in daily activities
- Heavy emphasis on drawing and writing with no alternative options for children who learn through physical activities.
- Curriculum is difficult to find on the ERD website.
- Options for Extended Time Periods in Appendix A do not include any theme related snack or play time activities.
- Stories from the field available on the ERD website are geared towards an adult audience and may not hold the attention of children.
- Music must be purchased and added by the user.

Lori Daniels

Aslan is on the Move!

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.LeaderResources.org

\$59.95; Downloadable

This creative intergenerational curriculum uses C.S. Lewis' beloved fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to explore theology. A 5-day lesson plan makes it suitable for VBS.

C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia series "as an unconscious preparation of the imagination" to explore the deep power of faith and belief. Acting in the imagination prepares us to respond in faithful ways when in our real lives we are confronted with meanness and treachery.

Themes of the five days are:

Day 1: Discovery of Narnia: how ideas about reality color behavior.

Day 2: Discovery of the Beavers and the abiding hope that Aslan will return: how values lead to action.

Day 3: Father Christmas and Spring return; Aslan greets the troop at the Stone Table, and Peter wins his first battle: how fear and love affect actions, and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Day 4: Aslan and the Witch strike a bargain: the meaning of a willing sacrifice, abiding belief, grief and joy.

Day 5: Joy of Coronation: how this adventure expresses truth and reality for us and connects to familiar celebrations.

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

- Offers opportunity for profound new understandings about life for all ages.
- Creates a magical VBS with the lamppost, the wardrobe door, Turkish Delight, and all the other fantasy elements from the story.
- Includes many active games plus discussion questions.

Weaknesses:

- Does not include specific biblical references or church history.
- Constructing props and scenery is time consuming and calls for creative use of materials and space.
- Requires purchase of a DVD of the story (\$14.95)

Lori Daniels

Clean Water for All God's Children

615.261.4008

info@livingwatersfortheworld.org

www.livingwatersfortheworld.org

Starter Kit: \$34.00 (also available in Spanish)

A mission project of the Presbyterian Synod of Living Waters, *Clean Water for All God's Children* is designed to enable children to understand the importance of clean water for health, and to show them ways to share in the mission of taking clean water to all the children of the world. The material can simply raise awareness of the world's great need for clean water, or it may educate a church that is preparing to send a team on an international mission trip. Each of the five days includes an opening time (with skit or puppet show and water conservation emphasis), a Bible story, a mission focus, activities/crafts, recreation and snacks, music and drama, and a closing time. Designed as a low-cost, thoughtful curriculum, all material in the basic notebook may be duplicated for use in the congregation's VBS program. A separate outline is provided for a preschool section, though younger children may join others during music time. Daily themes center on God's use of water:

1. *The Creation* - the goodness of water
2. *The Crossing of the Red Sea* - water for salvation
3. *The Healing of Naaman* - water for healing
4. *The Baptism of Jesus* - water as a sign of grace
5. *The Woman at the Well* - water for physical needs

Ages Levels: Preschool (separate program)

Grades K-5 (though ages are not specified)

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	—	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	—	Skits/Drama DVD
—	Alternate schedule	<u>X</u>	Sample poster

Strengths:

- One low-cost notebook contains all needed materials, including CDs.
- A single, mission-centered focus makes planning simpler.
- The daily reflection time allows just that: reflection, with time to slow down and listen to the children. It is an element rare in active summer programs.
- Music is simple, with several songs in both English and Spanish.

Weaknesses:

- Requires somewhat more creativity on the part of volunteers (this might be a strength)
- Growing germs from student hands on blood agar culture plates might give some teachers pause.
- No recommendations on snacks are provided.
- Few photos or graphics provided; photos show only children from Latin American countries.

Joyce Walker

Dare to be Different

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.leaderresources.org

Cost: \$49.95 (electronic download only)

A Wrinkle in Time film rental is extra; churches may also incur costs for public performance rights to show the film.

Dare to be Different is a one-week journey into Madeleine L'Engle's book, *A Wrinkle in Time*. Portions of the Disney film by the same name are shown each morning. Through games, activities and crafts, children learn about spiritual gifts, differences among people and the power of love. Guides for the 5-day program include Meg Murry, her brother Charles and a friend, Calvin O'Keefe, along with a number of out-of-this-world beings. Themes for each day:

Our Special Gifts

Following the Footsteps of Saints

Daring to be Different

Foolishness, Faith, and Free Will

The Power of Love

Ages Levels: Ages 5-12. Children are divided into small groups by age as needed.

Includes: ___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD ___ Music Action Training DVD
 ___ Music CD ___ Skits/Drama DVD
 ___ Alternate schedule

Strengths:

- Primary expense is the downloadable curriculum.
- L'Engle's book, a best-seller for more than 50 years, is grounded in Christian tradition and theology, mixing faith and science, religion and fiction
- Staffing may be easier when using a beloved children's book as the VBS theme.
- There is room for great creativity.
- Children are introduced to yoga, a valuable resource.

Weaknesses:

- No information is provided about securing public performance rights for showing a feature-length film, or how to acquire the film.
- Instructions for crafts and snacks are minimal, as is information on organizing the week.
- Many adults (or youth) with acting talents are required.
- There is no suggested mission/outreach focus.
- Music consists of a simple list of titles, without reference to specific hymnals or songbooks.

Joyce Walker

Festival of Faith

Active Learning Assoc., Inc.

www.associates.com

\$39.99

Festival of Faith invites children and adults to take part in the story of the Christian faith as it unfolds through the seasons of the Church Year. Each of the five days is devoted to a different season in the Church Year: Advent and Christmas; Epiphany; Lent and Easter; Pentecost; and Kingdomtide, also known as Ordinary Time or Late Pentecost. For each season there is a theme, scripture passage, and memory verse.

Children gain an understanding of the church as a global community through the activities in the lesson plans. Children are grouped according to “Embassies,” representing countries from the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia. Through the daily crafts and snacks children learn the customs of different countries. In large group opening and closing sessions, children learn the day’s theme and Bible story. The format includes an optional Ethnic Festival and Open House final program.

Age Levels: Children are placed in cross-age groups.
(The program is ungraded; appears suitable for grades Kindergarten – 6.)

Includes:

___	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	___	Music Action Training DVD
___	Music CD	___	Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

- Children learn much about other countries as well as about the church year.
- Enticing range of crafts – from stained glass to boomerangs and decorated eggs.
- Bible stories are told interactively, as “echo stories.”
- Clear and complete instructions.

Weaknesses:

- Considerable advance preparation of materials is required.

Lori Daniels

Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.LeaderResources.org

\$74.95; downloadable

Pilgrimage transports students into the Middle Ages to journey as pilgrims to sites where they learn from the lives of people of faith. The Middle Ages stand out as a time when Christians journeyed in faith to distant locations as a way to deepen their experience of God and others. On this pilgrimage, participants travel to the ultimate destination for God's faithful people: the Kingdom of God. Over five sessions, children find a road map that helps them to know themselves and others in new ways as they seek to know God as Creator, Savior and Holy Spirit.

Participants travel to five sites that were common destinations for medieval pilgrims: Rome, Italy; Canterbury, England; Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Dumfermline, Scotland; and Croagh Patrick, Ireland. Each day features not only a different destination but a different saint: St. Peter, Thomas Becket, James the Greater, Margaret of Scotland, and St. Patrick.

The heart of the daily experience is the Street Fair. Children become bakers, bookbinders, clothiers, painters, needle workers, stonemasons, woodworkers, and storytellers. As such, they participate in activities that are linked to the theme for the day. Guilds of students then meet to discuss their experiences in the Street Fair.

Ages Levels: Intergenerational, Kindergarten and up

(Ages 4 and younger need their own preschool group and some adaptation of materials)

Includes:

___	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	___	Music Action Training DVD
___	Music CD	___	Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

- Children learn about medieval and church history as well as the lives of saints.
- Exciting medieval setting, with shields, street fairs, and crafts from woodworking to bookbinding.
- Important daily themes – such as “The Kingdom of God is within you” – and memory verses.
- Clear and complete instructions.

Weaknesses:

- Requires considerable advance preparation for street fair activities.

ReNew: The Parable of the Sower

Spark House (order from Augsburg Fortress, www.augsburgfortress.org)

800.328.4648

www.wearesparkhouse.org

\$49.99; downloadable

ReNew is an environmentally-focused VBS program that inspires children and adults to grow in faith, have fun, and change the world as they practice stewardship of creation. Designed as a traditional, rotation-based Vacation Bible School, *ReNew* has modified and simplified the program to make it green. Using Jesus' *Parable of the Sower*, participants look at the story from perspectives of Self, Community, and World.

Daily themes:

- Planting Seeds
- Taking Root
- Growing
- Facing Challenges
- Living Together

ReNew has made a deliberate effort to teach and to practice good stewardship of the earth throughout this program. The curriculum, from reproducible pages to music CD's, is manufactured from recycled materials. Inks are soy-based and items often have more than one use, allowing for low-waste planning. Tips for caring for the earth are everywhere, drawing from the Bible as well as from the latest climate science. It is a fascinating and creative effort to "walk the talk" about taking care of God's creation.

Ages Levels: Pre School

Lower elementary (grades K – 2)

Upper elementary (grades 3-6)

Includes:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Download Clip Art	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Program DVD

Strengths:

- Teachers and other staff will learn right along with the children. There is much food for thought in the materials provided.
- Creative snacks reflect the daily themes.
- Consistent message that faith leads to action.
- Materials reflect ecological concerns and make Biblical links.
- Seeds (provided) when fully-grown, make toppings for a pizza!
- Offers an opportunity to involve a whole new group of church members in VBS,
- Blog at www.wearesparkhouse.org offers good ideas from earlier users.

Weaknesses:

- No specific mission project, although strong emphasis on serving community and world.
- Only one Bible story for the entire week

Joyce Walker

Wild Willy's Candy Factory: a New Look at the Prodigal Son

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.LeaderResources.org

\$49.95; downloadable

This vacation Bible experience is based on the children's story book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the 1971 version of the movie, *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. The curriculum examines the five children who are characters in the story and their character traits, which are then related to the sins of Greed, Pride, Envy and Sloth. The story of the Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11-24*) is the biblical basis for the program. Charlie, the main character who exhibits the traits of hard work, caring, sharing, honesty, and repentance, is compared to the prodigal son at the end of the story when he asks for forgiveness from his grandfather.

Age Levels: Elementary age children.

Includes:

___	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	___	Music Action Training DVD
___	Music CD	___	Skits/Drama DVD
___	Alternate schedules		

Strengths:

- Provides opportunity for children to learn character traits from the negative characters and the contrasting character of Charlie Bucket.
- Includes a craft each day which focuses on the character trait of each child.

Weaknesses:

- Biblical connections are tenuous.
- Requires materials to be purchased from specific distributors.
- Candy was given out each day; the "grand prize" was a lunchbox full of candy.
- The movie must be rented or purchased separately.

Amy Dyer

Wizards and Wonders: A Hero's Journey with Harry Potter

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.LeaderResources.org

\$59.95; downloadable

This Vacation Bible Experience uses the popular Harry Potter character to explore theologically life's journey as a path to the inner self and to the Creator. The curriculum connects Harry Potter's experiences and Biblical teachings. For example, the New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven is all around us and in us, and Jesus advises: "Let he who has ears hear and he who has eyes see." Likewise, in the Harry Potter books, the Wizarding World – representing magic with its possibilities for transformation – is all around and in the midst of the Muggles, but they do not see it.

The five sessions and the daily Bible stories are:

Day 1: Platform 9-3/4: Moses is called by God (*Exodus 2-4*)

Day 2: Quidditch: Jesus calls his disciples (*Matthew 4, 9, 10; Mark 1,2,3; Luke 5,6*); and
One body, many parts (Paul's letter to the Corinthians)

Day 3: A Night in the Forbidden Forest: Elijah and the still, small voice (*1 Kings 19:9-15*)

Day 4: Snares, Dares and Potions: Temptations in the wilderness (*Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4*)

Day 5: The Mirror of Erised: The Resurrection (The Baptismal Covenant)

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

Clip Art/Reproducible CD Music Action Training DVD
 Music CD Skits/Drama DVD

Strengths:

- Inclusion of resources with direct connection to the Harry Potter books, including a Hogwarts Acceptance Letter for each child, the Sorting Hat, Prof. McGonagall's Invisibility Cloak, Owl Mail Delivery and other wonders from the imaginary world of Harry and Hermione.
- Opportunity for children to learn a lot about themselves (in "identity" exercises) and to gain confidence for the life journey ahead of them.
- Theological background for each day is provided for the leaders.
- Includes lots of active games and the Hogwart Song.

Weaknesses:

- Requires free-spirited leaders.
- Requires advance preparation of space and materials.

Lori Daniels

Other Reviewed Programs

Amazing Desert Journey
Concordia Publishing House
800.325.3040
<http://www.cph.org/vbs>
\$129.99

This rotation style VBS focuses on teaching children God's plan to rescue them from sin and death through God's son Jesus Christ. Children will journey through the desert learning about God's forgiveness, mercy, and salvation from daily Bible stories and coordinated activities. Each day children will learn "God's activity for us" through daily *Take-Home Points*; God promises to save us from sin, God provides all we need, God gives us strength to resist temptation, God's son rescues us, and God's Son leads us home to heaven. *Amazing Desert Journey* is designed to inspire children to learn about Jesus, through activities that promote movement, engage senses, and challenge thinking.

Age Levels: Preschool
 Elementary

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Online Registration Tool	<u>X</u>	Director CD
<u>X</u>	Opening and Closing DVD	<u>X</u>	Music CD & DVD

Strengths:

- Director materials are available on a reproducible CD-ROM.
- Encourages Bible verse memorization.
- Includes Music CD & DVD and Opening and Closing Skit DVD in starter kit.
- PowerPoint presentations for music and opening/closing sessions are included.
- Tips for involving youth include shared leadership and Bible study.
- Includes *Operation Clean Water* as a suggested mission project.

Weaknesses:

- Heavy emphasis on sin overshadows the message of God's love.
- Focus on heaven as "home" and the emphasis of "Jesus leading us home" has the potential to frighten young children.
- Lacks reflection time, although the daily "take home point" is discussed and reinforced at each rotation activity.
- Music lacks creativity and may not be appreciated by older elementary students.

Lori Daniels

Amazing Wonders Aviation: Encountering God's Awesome Power

LifeWay

800.968.5519

www.lifeway.com

\$69.99 (Super Sampler: \$199.99)

Amazing Wonders Aviation is a rotation curriculum with an aviation theme that leads participants on a tour of the wonders of God's creation. Daily scripture connects Bible study to crafts, music, and recreational activities that are reinforced through worship and active response times. The themes are about God's power over nature, circumstances, sin, death, and my life. The central scripture passage for the week is Psalm 147:5: "Our Lord is great, vast in power; His understanding is infinite." The primary goal is for all participants to receive Christ as Lord and Savior and to evangelize others. The motto is, "Awesome God! Awesome Power!"

Ages Levels:

Infants/toddlers	Preteens
Preschool/kindergarten	Youth activity book
Elementary groupings	Adult activity book

Includes:	<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
	<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Director's DVD
	<u>X</u>	Alternate schedules	<u>X</u>	Decorating space DVD

Strengths:

- Detailed director's guide and age appropriate leader guides are provided, with additional online tools available.
- Good materials for youth and adults with special needs.
- Spanish resources are available, as well as some sign language instructions that go with the music.
- The mission rotation (with DVD) looks at missionaries around the world and their work
- Very flashy and appealing program if offered on the grand scale shown in the promotional DVD, especially if sets are created for each rotation.
- Online registration and organizational set up available—for \$30

Weaknesses:

- The emphasis on additional products to purchase and the one year availability suggest that this curriculum reflects the consumer aspect of the VBS industry.
- The emphasis on sin, conversion and salvation might not appeal to some denominations, such as the Episcopal teachings about baptism as the entry point to the church for all people.
- The music, while catchy and original, would take a trained and dedicated musical leader, and overlooks traditional VBS classics that would be familiar to teach and sing.
- While suggestions are provided for smaller programs, this curriculum is designed for a large scale VBS with dedicated staff, as well as many volunteers and resources.

Hester Mathes

Go Fish: Praise! Where Kids Get Down and Lift God High

Go Fish Resources

651.592.0622

www.GoFishResources.com

Cost: \$199

Go Fish: Praise! Where Kids Get Down and Lift God High focuses on describing and explaining five attributes of God: greatness, authority, providence, power, love. Using music with rhythms that sound like popular secular music and characters dressed to look like DJs or hip hop artists, the authors aim to make scripture relevant to a new generation. Because the authors believe in the infallibility of Holy Scriptures, the curriculum is written for a literal interpretation. Each day's lesson includes a scripture lesson to highlight the attribute of the day and features a craft activity to reinforce the lesson. Daily worship is accompanied by DVD tracks, making local musicians unnecessary. The daily skit features the same three characters for continuity. The extensive director's manual and site guides describe the authors' vision for how all of the pieces work together. The main activity of the three founders of Go Fish Resources is music; the identity of experts they teamed with to create the VBS content is not clear.

Age Level: Preschool (with separate guide) Elementary ages

Includes: X Planning DVD X Alternative schedule
 X Music CD & DVD X Director Guide + site leader guides

Strengths:

- Clear directions in site guides help volunteers understand how to run their sites
- Interactive Bible stories
- Materials address multiple learning styles
- Music is lively and will encourage movement

Weaknesses:

- Costly add-on materials prohibitive to many churches.
- No women featured in the Bible lessons or coloring sheets/craft activities.
- No inclusive language for God is incorporated
- Songs not related to scripture. (Songs about faith are "love songs to Jesus")
- The primary people featured in the DVDs are white males. (There are back up dancers of other races and female children.)
- Suggested theme snacks are unhealthy.
- Some suggested games are unsafe and/or have problematic theological connotations (ex: dodge ball –which the curriculum calls "idol knockdown." Each team guards an idol that they worship; the objective is to knock down the other team's "idol.")
- Several of the materials (especially those for pre-schoolers) are developmentally inappropriate
- Power and authority are stressed much more heavily than love. (Mercy, grace, and forgiveness are not mentioned.)
- Lack of information about the creators of the VBS content is troubling.
- Worship is "canned" with little room for local creativity.

Audrey O'Brien

Praying All the Time: Using Children's Books to Explore Different Kinds of Prayer

Leader Resources

800.941.2218

www.LeaderResources.org

\$49.95; downloadable

Originally designed as a Lenten program for children, *Praying All the Time* can be adapted for a five-session Vacation Bible School Program. Each day, children learn about prayer through children's books:

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

The Song of Francis and *The Legend of the Blue Bonnet* by Tomie de Paola

The Red Ribbon by John Lasne

Old Turtle by Douglas Wood.

Each session involves exploring a different prayer method, reading and discussing the daily children's story and creating a craft that serves as a reminder about a specific prayer method that connects to a story.

Ages Levels: Kindergarten to Fifth grade

Includes: ___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD ___ Music Action Training DVD
 ___ Music CD ___ Alternate schedules

Strengths:

- Emphasizes a loving God
- Focus on connecting with God through prayer.
- Excellent connection between children's literature and daily prayer methods.
- Affordable; primary expense is the download fee, printer costs and craft supplies.
- Teaches children several ways to pray and introduces them to thoughtful literature.

Weaknesses:

- Adaptation of curriculum is necessary in order to accommodate a traditional VBS program.
- Does not include typical VBS activities such as; daily games, snacks, or mission project.
- Limited music; only suggests using one Taize song.
- One of the books, *The Red Ribbon*, is out of print and may be difficult to find.

Lori Daniels

Rock the World VBS 2012

NextGen4Christ

www.rocktheworldvbs.com

Cost: \$49.99 (basic curriculum)
\$59.99 (basic + skit/worship DVDs)
\$74.99 (basic + skit/worship/resource DVDs)

Rock the World VBS is a five-session, high energy program that seeks to show children how Jesus “rocked the world by coming to earth and showing us God’s incredible love!” The rock band musical theme should engage most children as they “go on tour”, moving through rotation centers in single-age or mixed-age “bands.” Strong emphasis is placed on work projects in church and community, and on helping international mission projects (e.g., World Vision) financially. The Bible texts are taken from New Testament only, especially I John.

A separate curriculum for preschool children is available. For those churches who order the basic program, the music can be accessed through *youtube*. As a vital part of publicity, the curriculum writers strongly urge churches to plan a two-hour launch event to the community one week in advance. The publisher, NextGen4Christ, offers little information about what the company is or who comprises its leadership. The company can only be reached by email; no set address is apparent.

Ages Levels: PreSchool (ages 4-5)
Elementary (younger & older)

Includes: (depends on the level purchased; see above.)

<u>X</u>	Director’s Manual	<u>X</u>	Music Action DVD (<i>limited</i>)
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Skits/Drama DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule	<u>X</u>	Worship DVD

Strengths:

- Strong welcome to children as they enter each day. Interesting use of photography.
- Helpful calendar countdown information for director and staff.
- Comprehensive information about including children with special needs.

Weaknesses:

- Lack of information about the publishing company is troubling.
- Printing the curriculum is time consuming and costly, nearly 180 pages.
- The lack of an index made materials harder to use and compare.
- A “tour map” schedule of the week’s program is nearly unreadable due to small type.
- Snacks: only one small footnote offers some healthy alternatives; other selections rely on artificial sweets.

Joyce Walker

Sky: Everything is Possible with God

Group Publishing

www.group.com/vbs

Cost: \$157.99

Overview paragraph: Described as an easy VBS, *Sky: Everything is Possible with God* focuses on different aspect of trust. Daily stories from Hebrew Scripture and the New Testament underscore the importance of trust: “no matter who you are/how you feel/what people do/what happens/where you are....trust God.” Elementary-age children are divided into multi-age crews of five (with one crew leader); several crews rotate together daily through activity stations. A separate preschool program is available. Opening exercises, snack time and closings draw everyone together. The simple “sky” theme is intended to show that everyone can “fly high” because of the love and care of God. Each day’s schedule includes a clip from a cartoon film “Catch Some Air.” Scholars have found that the recommended Bible for *Sky*, the *New Living Translation Bible*, to be less accurate. Raising funds for mosquito nets (\$6 each, through World Vision) is the mission project.

Ages Levels: PreSchool (ages 4-5)
Elementary (grades 1-5)

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Cartoon DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule	<u>X</u>	On-line resources

Strengths:

- The Director’s Guide is clear, complete, and easy-to-use, regardless of program size.
- The program is fast-paced; activities are fun and engaging
- Memorization of Bible verses is strongly encouraged.
- An on-line tool, “VBS P.R.O.”, is available for planning registration. An enhanced online tool, “VBS P.R.O. Plus” (\$29.99 extra), provides additional support.
- Children help prepare the snacks.

Weaknesses:

- It’s not easy to distinguish one song from another – similar beat, similar lyrics, nothing unique. No music scores are provided.
- A separate “outlet catalog” sells many decorating items at www.groupoutlet.com
- Small imported plastic materials for crafts (“highly recommended” in teaching materials) are often marked as choking hazards. Use of craft kits adds significant cost to program.
- Little nutritional value in the highly sweetened snack suggestions.

Joyce Walker

SonRise National Park VBS: Point Your Kids to Jesus!

Gospel Light

800-446-7735

<http://www.gospellight.com/>

Cost: \$79.99

SonRise National Park VBS is a rotation curriculum where children spend the week exploring an “awesome” wilderness adventure park while learning that they can depend on Jesus to be their “all-powerful guide and savior.” Children face challenges that lead them to discover promises of Jesus reflected in each day’s themes of true peace, riches, power, love and hope. Four Bible stories focus on Jesus from the Gospels—including calming the storm, feeding the 5,000, facing temptation, and the parable of the Good Shepherd. The fifth story is about Paul and Silas in prison in the Book of Acts. Each highlights the need to depend on Jesus and accept him as Savior.

Age Level:

Preschool/kindergarten(with separate guide)

Elementary (Grades 1-4) Older elementary (Grades 5-6)

Includes:

<u>X</u>	Alternative schedule	<u>X</u>	Director Guide
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Planning DVD

Strengths:

- Offers daily "hands on" activities that reinforce Bible stories.
- Consistency of message throughout the colorful materials.
- Online connections with others through www.myvbsparty.com
- A complementary 13-week program is available.
- All director materials are available single reproducible CD-ROM.

Weaknesses:

- Heavy emphasis on salvation, receiving Christ as Savior and sole pathway to God.
- No reference to environmental concerns associated with National parks and forests.
- Does not include a mission project.
- Lacks diversity and caricature portrayal of Jesus might be considered offensive to some.
- Music CD and Skit DVD must be purchased separately.
- Music is unimpressive.

Lori Daniels

SPLASH in God's Word

Augsburg Fortress Press

800.328.4648

www.augsburgfortress.org

Cost: \$74.99

SPARK has taken summer programming materials to create a VBS curriculum called *SPLASH in God's Word*. All the lessons center around water – two from the Old Testament, two from the Gospels, and one from the Book of Acts. Children will explore the Bible story each day in a number of ways through activities and by actually looking up scripture. The curriculum is theologically sound, but interactive dialogue is often scripted, limiting imaginations and wondering. The overall presentation of materials is somewhat dated, emphasized by the lack of color. All materials can be downloaded from the website.

Ages Levels: PreSchool
Lower & Upper Elementary

Includes: X Director's Manual

Strengths:

- The programming options can be used at other times besides VBS – midweek events or in-depth Bible story activities during the year.
- All the stories have PowerPoint slides that can be projected to help the Large Group Gathering Leader tell the story each day.
- The program is centered around getting children to explore the Bible.
- Since the program is rotation model, Shepherds are used to lead groups of children. The Shepherds guide is very thorough and gives many options for keeping children engaged.

Weaknesses:

- Using the program is very time consuming – to the initial download and printing of the resources to the gathering of materials and set-up. Each lesson has multiple files that are difficult to collate and keep straight.
- Since the program is downloadable, all materials are in black and white. Costs increase with the purchase of ink cartridges/toner to print lesson materials and accompanying craft resources.
- There is no music CD, only lyrics are available. The Music Leader has to locate suggested songs and make up their own motions and movements.
- Activities were either not age appropriate (use of hammers with young children) or not engaging enough to maintain interest in lesson.
- Decorations are left to the leadership's imagination.

Kellee Wattenbarger

Zapped

Orange

<http://whatisorange.org/summerxp/>

866.343.4874

Cost: \$150

Through a journey with Peter in the New Testament, *Zapped* is designed to show children God's power, grace and love. The stories emphasize God's transforming love that changes the way the children think, the way they treat others, and the choices they make. The program can be offered in a typical five-day Vacation Bible School or as an eight-week series for Sunday mornings or other times. Activities for large and small groups allow leaders to use a variety of schedules. The kit does not include printed matter; all materials are included on seven disks, including a director's guide, drama scripts, craft instructions and snacks. *Zapped* provides a general guide that the leadership must craft into each church's unique setting and participants. The creators of *Zapped* believe that the Bible is "100% accurate, reliable and authoritative." They emphasize the need for each person to accept Jesus as Savior, "the only way to be forgiven and reconciled." This theology is somewhat different from an Episcopalian view that through baptism each person is welcomed into the church as a child of God.

Ages Levels: PreSchool (separate schedule and CD)
Elementary ages

Includes: Director's Manual Clip Art/Reproducible CD
 Music (downloadable for fee) Skits/Drama DVD
 Alternate schedule

Strengths:

- Makes the life of Peter accessible as a follower of Jesus
- Dramas are humorous while making a point; scripts allow users to create their own skits
- Snack suggestions have healthy options and are tied to the theme each day
- Volunteer pointers are helpful
- Music is lively and much better than typical VBS fare (only the theme song in a full mix is available in the kit; additional music must be downloaded. CDs can be bought with a discount for bulk purchases.)
- God's love is emphasized along with a message of falling short of God's intention and the need for personal salvation.

Weaknesses:

- Dramas do not mirror the world of children; themes and actors are more youth oriented
- The mission project is basically fund raising and does not create a sustainable relationship
- Crafts are not very imaginative, relying on companies such as Oriental Trading
- Using disks and downloads is cumbersome, time consuming and adds to the total cost

Dorothy Linthicum