

# 2014 Seasonal and Perennial Vacation Bible School Reviews



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**Name Blast off: Launching Kids on a Mission of God’s Love**

Publisher: Group Publishing

Cost: \$67.99

Phone number: 1-800-447-1070

Web Site Address: group.com/BlastOff

Overview paragraph: This VBS is an answer to those smaller churches that really can’t pull off a huge 5-day event. This program is designed with a simple theme for the 2½ days that they gather – God loves us, so...*love each other!* There are two Bible stories – 4 friends bring their friend to Jesus to heal and Jesus dies and comes back to life. There are several craft, game and service project options for each age level on each day. There is no snack rotation since the time together is only 2½ hours. The final day can be incorporated into a regular Sunday morning church service or be used as a stand-alone program. There are only 6 songs used during the program but they are upbeat and the CD is only \$4.99!

**Ages Levels:**    **X** PreSchool (ages 4-5)  
                          **X** Elementary (younger & older)  
                          Teen – purchase separately  
                          Adult – purchase separately

**Includes:**

<b>X</b>	Director’s Manual	Clip Art/Reproducible CD (\$19.99 additional) Music Action Training DVD (\$14.99 additional)
<b>X</b>	Music CD	Skits/Drama DVD
<b>X</b>	Alternate schedule	On-line resources

**Strengths:**

- This program would be good for a church that’s thinking about doing VBS for the first time or if they have limited number of volunteers. It’s a 2½ day program that can be easily adapted to morning, evening, or weekend programming.
- They do give you some options and flexibility with the crafts/service projects.
- Since the time commitment is reduced, you don’t need as many volunteers as you would for a full week program.

**Weaknesses:**

- One of the crafts involves glitter with the preschoolers – usually not a good combination!
- The service projects could be costly if you went out and bought the materials that are to be included in them, but that could be offset with a church/community awareness offering of those materials.

Kellee Wattenbarger  
Reviewer

**Name SonTreasure Island VBS – Where Kids Discover God’s Love**

Publisher: Gospel Light

Cost: Deluxe Kit - \$169.99

Phone number: 1-800-446-7735

Web Site Address: [gospellightvbs.com/sontreasure-island](http://gospellightvbs.com/sontreasure-island)

Overview paragraph: **SonTreasure Island** is based on 1 Corinthians 13 with overtones of Gilligan’s Island. The week will be spent discovering the rich treasure of God’s love and Jesus’ life surrounded by a beach/tropical theme. The 5 daily points are solid ones – God’s love is giving; God’s love is kind; God’s love is caring; God’s love is forgiving; and God’s love is forever. The stories used are familiar ones and told in an age-developmental way. Gospel Light does a good job of making sure the message of God’s love and saving grace is evident in all their lessons without being overbearing.

**Ages Levels:** **X** Preschool (Prekindergarten ages 3-4; Kindergarten ages 5-6)  
**X** Elementary (Primary ages 6-8; Middler ages 8-10; Preteen ages 10-12)  
Teen – purchase separately  
Adult – purchase separately

**Includes:**

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>X</b> Director’s Manual  | <b>X</b> Clip Art/Reproducible CD<br>Skits/Drama DVD           |
| <b>X</b> Alternate schedule | <b>X</b> On-line resources (photos, blog, forums,<br>training) |

**Strengths:**

- This is truly the reproducible VBS! The Director’s Manual has a CD that has everything and anything that you could think of for your VBS – training articles, forms, checklists, newsletters, and some of them are modifiable. You can also purchase the Reproducible Power Pack that has all the leader resources and guides to be printed (\$99.99).
- The craft book is a treasure trove – includes 46 crafts for the week that you can pick and choose depending on age and theme.
- You can either do this VBS as a rotation model or a classroom model. The games and bible story centers are separated into 3 age groups – Primary, Middler, and Preteen. Some of the centers are combined such as opening and closing, crafts, and snacks
- The music is reproducible also – though there are only 6 songs with 2 additional preschool songs.
- Decorating will be easy – beach theme with sand and water!
- Does have a nighttime VBS guide included in the deluxe kit.
- Offered more than one snack/food item for each day. Did tend more towards sugary snacks than healthy for main selections.

**Weaknesses:**

- Not a huge selection of music – only 6 songs with 2 additional ones for preschoolers.
- A lot of materials to go through on the discs but they do have them categorized in folders which helps somewhat.
- Snacks were a bit heavy on the sugary side but options were available.

Kellee Wattenbarger  
Reviewer

## Name **Jungle Safari – Where Kids Explore the Nature of God!**

Publisher: Standard Publishing

Cost: Super Simple Jungle Safari Kit \$199.99

Phone number: 1-800-243-9232

Web Site Address: [www.vacationbibleschool.com](http://www.vacationbibleschool.com)

Overview paragraph: **Jungle Safari** is a journey through the Bible, exploring the nature of God from Genesis to Revelation. Through the stories, the kids learn that they can count on God. The 5 stories/themes are God is CREATOR (story of creation), God is PROVIDER (story of Elijah), God is PROTECTOR (Daniel in the lion's den), God is SAVIOR (death and resurrection), and God is KING (story of John on Patmos). Standard has introduced two new sites in addition to the traditional ones – Crafts & Music where musical instruments are made to go with the lyrics and motions of the songs and Service & Missions where kids learn to impact their community and the world through activities and projects joined with either ongoing missions in your church or ones from Back2Back Ministries.

**Ages Levels:**   X   Preschool (ages 4-5)  
                      X   Elementary (younger & older)  
                      X   Teen  
                      X   Adult – purchase separately

### **Includes:**

X	Director's Manual	X	Clip Art/Reproducible CD
		X	Music Action Training DVD ( <i>limited</i> )
X	Music CD	X	Skits/Drama DVD
X	Alternate schedule	X	On-line resources (photos, Calendar of activities, slide show)

### **Strengths:**

- It is the most complete starter kit out there – it has all the materials you could ever need in .pdf files for download and printing. It also comes with 5 complete poster packs plus a CD to print other materials.
- They do a good job of making the Bible stories very interactive with objects and movement and participation of the kids though gathering some of the supplies/props might be very involved.
- There are intentional instructions for including children with special needs and making sure they are fully integrated in the program.
- The music is done by one artist – Yancey – a well-known Christian rock artist.
- Because all the forms and leader guides are downloadable, you can email them to your leaders!
- Includes a disc for all your media needs – MP3 and MP4 files for music and videos.

**Weaknesses:**

- Some of the crafts are not developmentally appropriate – they are too complicated for the ages given.
- Snacks tend to be more on the sugary side than healthy.

Kellee Wattenbarger  
Reviewer

**Name Wilderness Escape**

Publisher: Group Publishing

Cost: Ultimate Starter Kit \$139.99

Phone number: 1-800-447-1070

Web Site Address: [group.com/WildernessEscape](http://group.com/WildernessEscape)

Overview paragraph: **Wilderness Escape** is Group’s latest “time-travel” VBS. This year it is an exciting journey with God’s people, the Israelites, and Moses as they escape Egypt and have God provide and guide them through the desert. Moses is the central character that will interact with the participants each day – exploring an exciting adventure each day including:

Day 1 – God is with us; the Israelites cross the Red Sea.

Day 2 – God gives us what we need; God provides manna and quail.

Day 3 – God gives us strength; Israel defeats the Amalekites.

Day 4 – God saves us; Moses remembers Passover.

Day 5 – God guides us; God gives the Ten Commandments.

Each day is spent in “tribes” made up of all ages and they travel around to the Israelite Camp, Moses’ tent, Fun and Games and then gather together for opening and closing Tribe Time.

**Ages Levels:** all ages work together as tribes

<b>Includes:</b>	<b>X</b> Director’s Manual	<b>X</b> Clip Art/Reproducible CD
	<b>X</b> Music CD	<b>X</b> Music Action Training DVD ( <i>limited</i> )
	<b>X</b> Alternate schedule	Skits/Drama DVD
		On-line resources (photos, Calendar of activities, slide show)

**Strengths:**

- This is a great way to create an intergenerational VBS – involving all ages to create tribes and experience Bible times together.
- Music is upbeat and energizing and easy to learn.
- You can pick and choose how many different shops you want in the Israelite camp area to meet the needs of your volunteers and participants.
- Only need 3 trained station leaders – Music/Gathering; Moses, and Games.
- Does have a mission project included for present-day – clean water for children in India.
- They have included preschool-friendly options this year.
- This program can easily be adapted for use at other times – like Lenten programs.

**Weaknesses:**

- Can be very expensive if all the extras are purchased – things like the tribe flags and tote bags, but these can be made or duplicated without going to a huge expense.
- Can be a bit campy at times such as using Peeps for quail but sometimes fun is good.

- Music is not reproducible as the rights are owned by the original artists or other publishers but they have lowered the prices of the CDs for distribution – as low as \$4.99/100.
- Crafts/activities in the Israelite Camp can be expensive to purchase though you might be able to substitute similar ones.

Kellee Wattenbarger  
Reviewer



## **Name Gangway to Galilee: Amazing Grace Adventures**

Publisher: Concordia Publishing House

Cost: \$149.99

Phone number: 1-800-325-3040

Web Site Address: vbs.cph.org

Overview paragraph: **Gangway to Galilee** is a traditional style VBS in that their main message is the Gospel and God's message of saving grace. Each day the concept of sin and Jesus' saving grace is discussed in relation to the 5 stories. All 5 stories for the week are from the New Testament based around the Sea of Galilee and its shore – Jesus calls his disciples; Jesus teaches from the boat; Jesus calms the storm; Jesus walks on water; and Jesus appears to seven disciples. Each day has its own simple take-home point that all can learn and memorize. It is a rotation model with groups of kids rotating to each center, though preschoolers are kept separate from the elementary groups.

**Ages Levels:**    **X** Preschool (ages 3-5 but not attended kindergarten)  
                          **X** Elementary (K-5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
                          **X** Teen – purchase separately  
                          **X** Adult – purchase separately

### **Includes:**

<b>X</b> Director's Manual	<b>X</b> Clip Art/Reproducible CD
<b>X</b> Preschool Director's Manual	<b>X</b> Music Action Training DVD
<b>X</b> Music CD	<b>X</b> Skits/Drama DVD
Alternate schedule	<b>X</b> On-line resources (photos, Calendar of activities, slide show)

### **Strengths:**

- The snacks were a good balance between healthy and sugary – also had alternative snacks for a few of the days.
- Decorating will be easy and not too expensive – beach theme and water – all easily available in the summer.
- The starter kit is almost complete, even comes with poster sets! Does include CDs with all the power point presentations, .pdf files for reproduction, music DVD, etc.
- Has a separate overview for the pastor/minister. It concisely lists all the activities, stories, and how he/she can support the VBS and staff.

### **Weaknesses:**

- The music doesn't have much personality. All the songs sound very similar and repetitive. It does have a list of alternative hymns for music is desired.
- There is daily emphasis on "sin". It's never really defined but the image of not being good enough is stressed. This could be hard for some children to comprehend.

- The mission project doesn't have anything tangible for the kids. They are asked to bring money in for churches in other countries and shown pictures of what their money might be used for.
- Crafts aren't too imaginative – coloring and gluing.

Kellee Wattenbarger  
Reviewer

## **Name Workshop of Wonders**

Publisher: Cokesbury

Cost: Starter Kit \$89.99; Super Starter Kit with Mega Media Kit \$ 127.49; Small Church Starter Kit \$ 59.99

Phone number: 1-800-672-1789

Web Site Address: <http://2014.cokesburyvbs.com>

### **Overview paragraph:**

At the Workshop of Wonders, children will discover the wonder of God all around us. The children will see how the ordinary becomes extraordinary with God, see how people in the Old and New Testaments used what they had to do extraordinary things with God, and use their own hearts, minds and imaginations to serve God. The daily themes of Imagine with God, Build with God, Grow with God, Work with God and Walk with God all lead the children through stories in the Bible that can then be applied to their own growing relationship with Jesus. This program is designed to help kids see that even the things they might not consider important can be used by God to do the amazing. It is all about how God can use us to create WOW moments for God's glory!

**Ages Levels:** X PreSchool (ages 3 through Kindergarten)  
X Elementary (1st grade through 6th; 'Tween' options presented )  
X Teen – Youth Guide for Classes available  
X Adult – Lesson Guide available for Adult leaders.

### **Includes:**

“Starter Kit” includes: Director Guide, Preschool/Kindergarten Leader Guide, Assembly, Music, Science, Bible Storyteller, Decorating, Recreation, Mission, Craft, Snack, Reflection time Leader Guides (print), Music CD, Samples of Scripture Treasures, Shop Apron, Photo Frame and Craft Samples along with other samples such as name tag, invitation postcards, and student books for each level.

“Mega Media Pak” (Included in the Super Starter Kit) also includes the Adventure Video DVD for opening and closing, the Music Video DVD, and the Decorating Publicity CD ROM.

Other items for purchase include banners, signs, etc.

### **Strengths:**

- Very adaptable. You can do this in a week, in a month, even one day. They provide a good range of time based schedules as well (2 hour, 3 hour, rotation model, etc)
- Stories are a good balance of OT and NT
- Songs are well written, easy to learn but fun for kids and adults
- Both Science and Craft have multiple options for each day
- Leader's guides provide ample information, suggestions, and support
- Webpage, FB page, blog and Pintrest page have great ideas from churches

- Mega Media Pak provides separate disks for Music, Assembly and Decorating, allowing different leaders to all have access.

**Weaknesses:**

- Crafts can be pricey, however they do offer low cost alternatives
- Graphics and Titles are not as WOW as they could be. I often tell people “it’s better than the name implies!”
- Some of the extras can be quite pricey, such as the banners or the preprinted materials. However, you can adapt and not use the preprinted materials
- When doing shorter options, reflection time can be left out. Leaders would need to ensure that students are discussing the Bible message throughout the session time.

Reviewer Anne Shelton

***Weird Animals: Where Jesus' Love Is One of a Kind***

Group VBS  
800-447-1070  
group.com/vbs  
Starter Kit cost: \$169

The main emphasis of the *Weird Animals* VBS program is the Jesus' love for all people, no matter how different they may be. Activities each day are centered on a Bible story, which, for the most part, are appropriate for children. The one exception is the general story on the fourth day about the death and resurrection of Jesus, with emphasis on the two criminals who were crucified with him. Some of the suggested dialogue is heavy-handed, with a strong emphasis on "wrongdoings." Even the snack reinforces this theme with a comparison to the "bitterness" of cinnamon to sin, which is "gross." For the most part, however, the love of Jesus is the focus of activities, music, and storytelling. Each day is well-planned, with a gathering for all ages and a "Tail End" that brings everyone back together at the end of the program for songs and to review the theme for the day. The "KidVid Stories" bring diversity to any VBS setting with films about real children facing issues such as nontraditional families, autism, leukemia, bullying, and facing fear. Thoughtful leaders should be able to use the basic materials in *Weird Animals* to create a week of fun and learning for children in their community.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool, Elementary age, Adults\*  
\*New Adult Outreach Kit now available (\$49.99)

**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	<u>X</u>	Decorating DVD

**Strengths:**

- The Starter Kit includes most of the materials needed for a VBS, if leaders are creative and can substitute their own craft creations and decorating props.
- The materials are user friendly, designed for a range of leaders from first timers to those with extensive VBS experience.
- Churches can create their own VBS website with free software to promote, register and organize their programs.
- Additional ideas and support for *Weird Animals* are available on the Group VBS website.
- The music is a notch above many VBS offerings. The words emphasize hope and love and the music itself is upbeat. The music CD comes with vocal and instrumental selections, while a separate DVD can be used to teach children motions to go with the songs.
- The mission component, a money-raiser to provide clean water in India, will help children learn about the importance of water and its scarcity throughout the world.

**Weaknesses:**

- If leaders purchase additional student and decorating resources, this program is very pricey.
- The materials are over-scripted in many cases; even the person making snacks is told what to say.
- The mission component costs \$50 or more to set up and basically encourages children to bring in money. A more hands-on approach for a community organization might be a better way to teach children about helping others.

- Scripts for stories and other materials may need to be rewritten to reflect the beliefs of the sponsoring congregation.
- The cost of cheaply-made plastic “gizmos” for the Imagination Station is about \$3.70 per child for the week. A better idea would be to create a science station that uses everyday materials.

Dorothy Linthicum

**Name Welcome! Give and Receive God’s Great Love**

Publisher: MennoMedia  
Cost: \$159.99 includes 2 copies of Director’s Guide, and guides for Worship & Drama, Active Response, Bible Response, Creative Response, and Early Childhood and 1 copy of Song CD, Memory Verse DVD, and Songbook.  
Phone number: 1-800-245-7894  
Web Site Address: www.mennomedia.org

**Overview paragraph:** From Abraham and Sarah – who welcomed three strangers and prepared a meal for them – to Luke and Paul – who accepted generosity when shipwrecked on the island of Malta – Scripture is filled with stories of hospitality. *Welcome! Give and Receive God’s Great Love* invites children to discover God’s amazing love through the stories of God’s people. They demonstrated kindness, made friends, and took care of those who were hurt. They reflected the love of a God who welcomes and cares for each of us.

Each session has a Theme, Bible Text, Faith Focus, and Bible Memory Verse

Texts: Genesis 18:1-15                      Memory Verse:            Matthew 25:35  
          Luke 10:25-37                                                           Leviticus 19:18b  
          Luke 19:1-10    1 John 4:12b  
          1 Samuel 25:14-35    1 Samuel 25:32b  
          Acts 28:1-10    Matthew 7:12a

**Ages Levels:**            Elementary k-5  
                                  Early Childhood (ages 4-5)  
                                  Teen – not available  
                                  Adult – not available

**Includes:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Director’s Manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD ( <i>limited</i> )
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	On-line resources (photos, Calendar of activities, slide show)

- Strengths:**
- Strongly Scriptural, with daily Bible stories and daily memory verses
  - Each “Response” – Bible, Creative & Active – includes a “debrief” section that ties the activity to the Scripture and to children’s everyday lives
  - Guides for both older and younger children include recommended picture books to have on hand
  - Director’s Guide walks even a total newcomer through the steps to creating a thriving VBS

- Songs are fairly easy to follow and some of them of the African songs are on youtube!
- All Responses and Drama segments are easily assembled from materials at hand.
- Includes an excellent description of why the Church should invest in VBS and basic safe church training
- Alternate scheduling is provided for a 10-week midweek program and as a weekend retreat

**Weaknesses:**

- Drama segments require a lot of memorization and some require several people
- Tween and Teen connection is entirely as helpers and group leaders
- Song cd is very bland
- Bible Memory Verse videos don't add much to the value of the kit
- There is no social media presence for Welcome!

Reviewer Charlotte Hand Greeson



**Name: Praise Break: Celebrating the Works of God!**

Publisher: Abingdon Press

Cost: \$74.99

Phone number: 1-800-672-1789

Web Site Address: AbingdonPressVBS.com

Overview paragraph: **Praise Break** is based on Psalm 107 and the overall theme that God is good. The 5 themes/stories used during the VBS include Praise God for Freedom (deliverance from the Egyptian army/Miriam dancing), the Faith to Pray (the healing of Hezekiah), The Savior’s Birth, Lost and Found (the parable of the Lost Coin), and Marching to Zion (Palm Sunday). Just like times of old when people suffered and had times of troubles, God had brought them out of their troubles and it is always good to pause and praise the Lord. Each story is also supplemented with both historical and present-day African-American models. The music, crafts, snacks and outreach are all based on God’s love for us and the reminder that we should thank Him daily. – make a daily praise break part of our daily routine!

- Ages Levels:**
- X** Preschool/Kindergarten (ages 4-5)
  - X** Elementary (younger-grades 1-3 & older-grades 4-6)
  - X** Teen – purchase separately
  - X** Adult – purchase separately

**Includes:**

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>X</b> Director’s Manual  | <b>X</b> Clip Art/Reproducible CD                                 |
|                             | <b>X</b> Music Action Training DVD ( <i>limited</i> )             |
| <b>X</b> Music CD           | Skits/Drama DVD   |
| <b>X</b> Alternate schedule | On-line resources (photos,<br>Calendar of activities, slide show) |

**Strengths:**

- The whole program is wonderful!
- The music is current – a mix of hip-hop, gospel, praise, slow, fast – a breath of fresh air as far as VBS music is concerned.
- The supplemental material each day of historical and present-day African-Americans is a great way to introduce the participants to people who have overcome and continue to overcome hardship and doing so through their faith.
- The crafts are simple but totally integrated with the stories. They are also age-appropriate.
- This program is presented as an evening program and even has meal/dinner suggestions included in the leader’s guides.
- LOVE the fact that there is an outreach component connected with each story. The outreach programs are not just for that particular day – they have long-range programs that continue long after VBS is over.

**Weaknesses:**

- I’m not sure there are any

Kellee Wattenbarger

### ***Aslan is on the Move!***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$59.95

[www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org)

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:**

—	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	—	Music Action Training DVD
—	Music CD	—	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 the Bible or church history.
- Constructing props calls for creative use of materials and space.

## ***Clean Water for All God's Children***

Living Waters for the World 2006/Presbyterian Church USA

615-261-4008

info@livingwatersfortheworld.org

www.livingwatersfortheworld.org

Starter Kit: \$34.00

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

**Ages Levels:** Preschool (separate program)

Grades K-5 (though ages are not specified)

### **Includes:**

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

### **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.

*J. Walker*

## ***Dare to be Different***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

[www.leaderresources.org](http://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.

## ***Festival of Faith***

Active Learning Assoc., Inc.

\$39.99

www.alassociates.com

*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:**

<input 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:**

- 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.

## ***Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$74.95

[www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org)

*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. The day closes with community singing, prayer, and worship.

**Ages Levels:** Intergenerational, Kindergarten and up  
(Ages 4 and younger need their own preschool group and some adaptation of materials)

**Includes:**

<input 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:**

- 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.

*L. Daniels*

**ReNew: The Parable of the Sower**

Spark House (order from Augsburg Fortress, [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

800-328-4648

[www.wearesparkhouse.org](http://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 type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<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, those concerned about ecology and the environment, gardeners, earth scientists, etc.
- Blog at [www.wearesparkhouse.org](http://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

*J. Walker*

***Wild Willy's Candy Factory: a new look at the Prodigal Son***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$49.95

www.LeaderResources.org

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.

A. Dyer



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

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$59.95

[www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org)

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*); also

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.

*L. Daniels*

***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*

**Name Peaceable Kingdom**

Publisher: Leader Resources

Cost: \$69.95

Phone number: 1-800-941-2218

Web Site Address: [www.LeaderResources.org](http://www.LeaderResources.org)

Overview paragraph: “Peaceable Kingdom” is the latest curriculum written by the late Trudy Ardizzone. It explores anti-bullying themes through the use of favorite children’s literature characters such as Horton the elephant, Yertle the turtle, Gertrude McFuzz, Mama and Papa Bear, Old Turtle and Gerald the giraffe. This curriculum could be used at any time not just Vacation Bible School as the theme is so universal and relevant for our times. The children spend time together learning how to be nice to everyone and to identify what bullying looks like in their worlds. The themes for the 5 days include Be Your Best Self, A Place for Everyone, Turn the Other Cheek, Made in God’s Image, and Be Courageous – all done through Bible stories and children’s literature. The curriculum also includes major bullying research results that are incorporated into each day’s presentation.

**Ages Levels:**            PreSchool (ages 4-5)  
                                  **X**     Elementary (younger & older)  
  Teen  
  Adult

**Includes:**     **there is only one guide and it is downloadable**

**Strengths:**

- The theme is a timely one and the program could be used at any time, in any venue
- Set-up is minimal so those on a tight budget could easily do this program
- No set snack ideas so you can do whatever you please AND they do recommend a lunch component to end the time together
- Activities such as games and gathering time are based on cooperation instead of competition
- Only need 3 major volunteers for reoccurring speaking parts each day

**Weaknesses:**

- The activities are geared for an older audience, not sure that it would work easily with children under the age of 5 due to attention span

Kellee Wattenbarger