



Introduction

Lesson aims

How can we encourage creativity? Caedmon and his patron Hilda (or *Hild*, in the Roman Catholic tradition) offer some clues.

The intended learning outcomes enable each pupil:

- To think about and value their own personal abilities, as well as those of others, and to consider how these could be developed or used in future, and to design 'trophies' for particular skills and talents from a personal/faith perspective.
- To produce an original piece of creative writing or music.
- To explore how disputes can be resolved and positive friendships generated.
- To discuss the importance of rules for making life fair and safe.

The objectives for each pupil are:

RE:

- To consider what it means to have talents or skills, and the responsibility that Christians believe everybody has to develop and use them well.

Literacy/History:

- To study, ask questions and draw conclusions from (adapted) source material.

Music:

- To create an original piece of music to accompany a script.
- To compare different treatments of the same source material.

Citizenship:

- To consider personal skills and talents to share with others.
- To explore methods for resolving disputes.

History:

- To explore the lives and beliefs of two early Christian saints.
- To analyse (adapted) historical documents for clues about the past.

Background information

Hilda (born in AD 614) had been baptised into Christianity as a child in a noble Anglo-Saxon family. At the age of 33, her vocation to become a nun was altered when Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne



spotted her 'potential'. Under his guidance, she took charge of a succession of religious communities, then supervised the creation of a large monastery at Whitby with its mixed community of monks and nuns - not thought to be really 'proper' across Christian Europe but she made it work. Whitby Abbey became a centre for prayer and worship, and the study of big ideas.

In AD 664, Hilda hosted the strategic Synod of Whitby, which made a decision on the politically sensitive date on which Easter should be celebrated. This symbolised a conflict between two competing jurisdictions and church models, one emanating from Rome (influencing Britain from the south), and the other from Ireland (influencing Britain from the north and west.) After a long argument, the Roman model won. Hilda did her best to smooth over the bitter atmosphere and its aftermath - and, in passing, discovered the significant musical talent of a man who worked on the Abbey farm.

For further background information, see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Penguin Classics, 1990). The material here has been adapted from Bede's words (Book 4, Chapters 23 and 24).

Development

Organise the class into pairs and get the children to discuss what they are good at, with each partner listing some of the skills and talents they see displayed in each other. Then, referring to a current popular talent-spotting show on TV, ask what qualities the 'judges' are looking for when they seek to discover a new talent - for example, raw ability, a willingness to improve, a sense of single-minded dedication and so on. Explain that today's story is all about someone's talent being discovered, as well as the 'judge' who discovered him and brought his talent to a wider audience.

Tell the story of Caedmon - see [Worksheet 1: Caedmon discovers his song](#).

Note that Caedmon himself didn't have a clue about his hidden abilities until the dream happened; he was not a young man by this time; he was possibly a 'bit of a loner' and anyone looking at him would not have spotted anything unusual.

- Can you name any famous singers/entertainers who weren't expected to be talented when people first saw them?

Now consider what the judges in talent competitions do when they discover a new talent - offer training, a chance to live in a new environment, opportunities to perform elsewhere and so on. Compare this with what Hilda offered Caedmon. What's similar? She saw his talent and was determined to encourage him... but why? Hilda believed in encouraging people to use their talents to love God and serve him to the best of their ability. In the case of Caedmon, his song-writing ability needed more source material to work with, which he got from the Bible. So, Caedmon was encouraged to leave his farming duties to concentrate instead on developing his music.

- What talents do you have hidden away inside you, waiting to be discovered and developed?



Use [Worksheet 2: Hilda and Caedmon](#) for a quick recap of the key points of the story.

Cross-curricular links

1. Religious Education

a. Caedmon's talent

Caedmon enjoyed using his new ability but he didn't seem to be interested in becoming famous!

- Is there something you really like doing?

Get the children to write about all the things they like doing for fun - not including those things that involve just sitting and watching - things that really make them feel 'alive' when they do them.

Now read the parable of the talents told by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-26. A talent was a large sum of money in Roman times. In English, it also describes a natural ability. This parable has been interpreted to mean that everyone should use the abilities they have been given by God.

- What do you think?
- What are your talents?
- Are you using them to the full yet?
- If God was to award you with a trophy, what do you think it would be for? Design and label it.

It is easy for the discussion here to get fixed on sporting skills or music abilities. Try to open it up to include skills of working with other people and general creativity, including ability in other school subjects. This could be a good time to praise those pupils who don't normally get noticed.

b. Talents and ambitions

- Do you have any secret talents that nobody in school knows about?
- What could you do with your talents to make the world a better place?

Give each child a rectangle of paper - this will serve as a 'brick' in a wall display. Set the task of writing and illustrating a sentence about what they would like to do with their talents to make the world a better place. Then, once the class 'wall' has been created, devise a class quiz to encourage children to read each others bricks, using questions such as 'Who's wanting to be a builder?'

c. Hilda

Hilda was an encourager. She actively searched for talented people who could serve God by supporting or joining the church. Get the children to create and write a card/letter of encouragement to someone they know - it could be about a time when they really appreciated something the person did.

- What do you admire and like about them?

- Do you need to say thank you to them?

2. Literacy

a. Caedmon's dream

When our brains make connections between different memories, we call it 'thinking'. Dreaming is the disorganised thinking that takes place just before we wake up - and the thoughts can sometimes be disconnected! Sometimes, a dream can have a powerful impact. Get the children to write about a dream that made them feel good. Most dreams seem to end too quickly. Now, get them to write about a dream and keep the story going until they are happy with it. And for those who don't dream, get them to write about what they would like to dream. (*NB: It might be wise to read through a child's work before letting them read it out!*)

b. Wow! Poetry!

Caedmon's first song praised God for his creation.

- What amazes you most about our world, its place in the universe, and the creatures and other life forms that live here?

Get the children to name some of the most amazing things they know of in the natural world, then ask them to suggest some interesting adjectives, verbs and adverbs to describe both them, their habitat and the things they do in that place. Get them to turn these words and phrases into a poem or prayer which conveys their feelings about that creature. It could be a praise poem that a believer could write, thanking God for this marvellous world. Encourage them to use a variety of verse forms for this, including kennings, haiku and tanka.

3. Music

A great deal of early English music was religious, much of it based on texts from the Christian Bible. This was partly because singing enabled people to remember large chunks of the Bible by heart, at a time when few could read or write.

a. Composing a percussion-based piece of music

Set the task of creating a percussion 'sound-picture' to accompany a Bible passage, such as the creation of the world from Genesis 1, a psalm (93 or 104 or 148?) or something a little different like Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 ('A time for everything...').

They will need to have a large copy of the text with space to add their own symbols to show their planning. Begin by encouraging them to explore the different sound possibilities of their instrument, running a few shared exercises on a 'copy-my-beat' basis, and explore the dynamic range (volume) of different instruments too.

Set the task of providing an appropriate sound effect for each line of the passage, which somebody will have to read out aloud. Encourage them to aim for variety in sounds, sometimes using a beat, sometimes not. Give personal 'support' to those determined just to make it louder! Children should work in small groups, preferably at some (supervised) distance away from each other so they can hear themselves think and work. (This is a good outdoor activity for a sunny day.) You may need to provide shortened simpler texts for some children.

If possible, record and playback the results for general admiration. As follow-up, get them to play the pieces again but without anyone reading the Bible passage. They've now created an original piece of music!

b. Caedmon's song

More able children should be encouraged to study Caedmon's original lyrics (see [Worksheet 3: Caedmon's song](#)). Set them the task of rewriting the song for a modern audience and/or producing their own musical accompaniment for it. Begin by asking them to identify the key ideas that Caedmon is trying to express, then set them the task of rewriting the song in their own words.

- Are there any lines worth repeating?
- Are there any rhymes or nearly-rhymes you could use (although it doesn't have to rhyme)?
- Might there be a chorus?
- If Caedmon's song is 'Part 1', then what would 'Part 2' be all about?

Finally, get them to perform their song: a performance doesn't have to involve singing - it might involve a dramatic recitation of text, accompanied by appropriate music.

4. Citizenship

a. Sharing your talents

Give each child a large piece of paper and get them to draw three large concentric circles, rather like an archery target or dartboard. In the centre, pupils should draw themselves or write their own name. In the middle ring, they should write or draw any talents they think they have. In the outer ring, they should draw or write the names of any places, people or situations that could benefit from these talents being used responsibly.

b. Peacemaking: a drama role-play

Hilda (like Cuthbert) was adept at sorting out disputes. This role-play encourages children to think about the strategies for doing this in a real-life situation.

After a few verbal warm-up activities - sorting the group into two halves, each half taking turns to recite a nursery rhyme using alternate words - seat the children in pairs, facing each other, and ask them to generate an imaginary dispute between two schoolchildren in the playground who can't agree on what to play next. (*No fighting or bodily contact is allowed.*) Get them to 'act' this out for

about a minute, then ask if anyone would like to replay their 'argument' as a short performance for the others. After each performance, ask for suggestions as to how each dispute could be resolved. Point out that a lot of arguments start because people stop listening to each other and think of their own needs. Now set everybody the challenge of replaying their own arguments so that there are no losers, so that the two schoolchildren settle things amicably. Finally, ask some of the original 'replays' to perform their improved conversations, and praise them for thinking it through like this.

c. Rules of life

Hilda discovered that all sorts of problems can arise when a group of people are living and working together. She sorted out these problems out in a variety of ways. One was to encourage the monks and nuns to rediscover the reason for their membership of a monastery in the first place, which is why reading the Bible was so important, because it taught essential truths about God. Another was to encourage strict discipline in observing the monastic rule - a set timetable that gave a structure to the day, including times for worship, work and rest. She also set a personal example for others to follow, and took an interest in everybody - she wasn't called 'Mother' for nothing! Use [Worksheet 4: Hilda's advice for life](#) to explore her ideas.

Then recap on why we have rules - for example, driving on the left in the UK. Set the pupils the task of creating a set of positive rules about something that affects them personally - for example, rules for the classroom, keeping a safe playground, watching TV without arguments, using the Internet safely and so on. Remind them that a good set of rules should be positive and not negative - avoiding a shopping list of 'Don'ts'. Illustrate this with a poster and reward those who don't use a simple Highway Code-type symbol (for example, a red circle with a line through it).

d. Positive peacemaking

- Does your school have any strategies for generating friendship and peace among pupils, such as a friendship bench or playground buddies?
- How do these strategies relate to the teachings of Jesus in the beatitudes (Matthew 5:9)?

Pupils may wish to suggest further ideas that could be passed on to the school council for further development.

e. Complementary skills and talents

It's easy to envy someone with talent, but most activities need a variety of skills from different people to work. Discuss how we don't necessarily have to choose friends who are just 'like' us - every successful team needs to call on a diversity of talents and personalities.

5. History

Hilda was a remarkable woman who lived and worked (and was deeply respected) at a time when men were thought to be better at everything. You can read her story in [Worksheet 5: The life of the Abbess Hilda of Whitby](#), along with [Worksheet 4: Hilda's advice for life](#). Historians often

have to study old documents to piece together evidence about the past.

- What do these documents tell us about life in Anglo-Saxon times? List five significant facts, explaining why you chose them.
- What's the most interesting question you can think of about what the two documents tell you?
- In Anglo-Saxon times, women were often thought to be second-best to men. What clues can you find in Worksheet 5 to show how Hilda proved them wrong?

6. Differentiation

a. SEN

This might be a useful time to have a positive discussion with an SEN pupil about the things they find difficult in class - and why. Point out that Caedmon didn't have a clue about his secret ability and these talents went unnoticed for years - until they were unlocked by a dream and a word of encouragement. As part of your discussion with them, identify some of their current targets and give them a pat on the back for the progress they have made in the past year.

b. More Able

Hilda was a peacemaker. Set the task of researching the life and work of some famous modern peacemakers - for example, Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Junior, Nelson Mandela, Corinne Aquino, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

- What key beliefs did they have that made their achievements possible?

7. Plenary: Discussion points

- Have you discovered anything surprising about someone else in the class during this session?
- Have you learned anything new about yourself?
- What could you do to encourage someone at home who needs it?