



Introduction

The story of the spies going into the Promised Land (Numbers 13-14) is a corker because of its strong themes of trust and fear in the face of something new. What follows is an idea for a year group or whole school assembly that gets into the story and offers further ideas for classroom follow-up.

Development

Use a timeline to show the children where in the Bible this story comes (after the story of Moses leading the people of God out of Egypt and across the desert and just as they are about to enter the Promised Land). Alternatively, ask the children what they can already tell you about Moses; ask if they know anything about Moses' young friend, Joshua. If they mention the walls of Jericho, explain that this story comes before that, before the people of God even get as far as Jericho.

Have some children to act out the story below as you tell it. You will need a Moses, a Joshua and a Caleb. In addition you will need someone to play God and the other ten explorers, while the rest can be God's people, who hear and react to what the others saw.

The story

God rubbed his hands in excitement. He jumped up and down with glee. After walking through the wilderness for 40 years, at last his people had arrived at the edge of the Promised Land! The land he had been getting ready for them for years! The land that was full of good things to eat and drink! The land that had so much, it was as if it was flowing with milk and honey! God sat down and called to his friend Moses.

Moses took his sandals off and stood up and listened hard to get the instructions right. God told Moses to choose twelve leaders to send into the Promised Land to explore it. Moses nodded. He chose twelve leaders from the tribes of Israel and sat them down in front of him.

He said to them: 'Go and see what the country is like; what the cities are like; what the people are like. Bring us back some fruit so we can see how well it grows there.' (***)

The twelve explorers lined up and marched off across the River Jordan into the Promised Land. When they saw the countryside their mouths fell open; and two of them, Joshua and Caleb, did a high five.

When they saw the cities they trembled; except Joshua and Caleb, who were busy choosing where they would like to build their houses.

And when they saw the giant people, their knees knocked together; except Joshua and Caleb, who were too busy thanking God for this lovely place where they were going to live. (***)



They cut a bunch of grapes that was so big that it took two men to carry it on a pole. And Joshua and Caleb were the only ones whose eyes weren't goggling and whose knees weren't knocking, so they got to carry the grapes. They all marched back to Moses and the people.

The explorers sat down in front of the people, biting their nails. God rubbed his hands, ready to hear the explorers tell the people what a wonderful country they were going to live in.

They said: 'The fruit is really good.'

And God nodded happily.

Then they all said, 'BUT...' and it all came rushing out: 'The cities are huge and strong! And the people are so enormous! We looked like grasshoppers next to them! We'll never win any wars against them!'

And all the people went, 'Ooooooh! (***) That's really scary! We don't want to live there!'

God was really fed up and he folded his arms. He'd gone to all this trouble to get a fantastic country ready for his people, and here they were, worrying their socks off! He didn't want his people to be scared - he wanted them to be happy. He gave Joshua and Caleb a prod.

And Joshua and Caleb said: 'Just trust God! We've *got* to have this amazing land! It won't be a problem. Don't get your knickers in a twist. It doesn't matter how big the people are, if we've got God on our side.'

And as it turned out, Joshua and Caleb were right. God's people had nothing to worry about. It didn't matter how big the people there were or how strong the cities were - with God on their side they could go in and enjoy that wonderful place God had got ready for them. I expect they all enjoyed eating the grapes. too!

1. At the points marked (***) you might like to stop and use drama ideas to explore the feelings of the characters at that moment before you press on with the story. For example you could hot seat the characters or you might just ask them:

'How do you think you're feeling when this happens?'

'Why do you feel like that?'

'What are you feeling about Moses at the moment?'

'What are you feeling about God at the moment?'

2. For follow-up in the classroom

The story is about facing something new and unknown. It throws up feelings of nervousness, adventurousness; trust and mistrust; excitement, fear, disappointment; puzzlement, faith and



praise. Try to ask questions that relate those feelings to times the children have felt these things, for example:

So, the explorers were very nervous about going into the Promised Land:

I wonder when you've been nervous about going somewhere new?

I wonder how you felt?

I wonder who you turned to for advice?

What helps you when you feel scared by new things?

What sort of rumours about changes worry you?

Caleb and Joshua trusted God. Why did they dare to do that?

How do you think God helps Christians today to face what's new?

3. Imagine you are one of the people of God who had listened to the reports of the spies. Most of your neighbours have decided that you shouldn't go ahead because of the reports and that everyone should simply turn back to Egypt under a new leader. How would you convince them to change their minds?
4. In groups work out contrasting newspaper headlines that sum up the two attitudes to facing something new: one positive (for example, it will be an adventure; new places to explore; new experiences to enjoy) and one negative (for example, it will be frightening, full of uncertainty; not safe; dangerous and too much effort).
5. Talk about how this story connects to the changes that the children face: a new class next year; a new home; a new school; new places to visit.