

Introduction

What could 'Jesus, Light of the World' possibly mean for children today? This activity works well as a cross-curricular classroom lesson linking Literacy, RE and Music. It can also be adapted to use for classroom collective worship, as a performance for whole-school collective worship, or even a school concert. Be creative, but remember to fix clear lesson objectives beforehand, so things don't get too fuzzy.

The activity is designed to work in three parts, so you might want to split it into two or three separate lessons, gradually adding the successive elements together. Allow lots of rehearsal time if pupil compositions are going to be crafted into a performance piece.

Preparation

You will definitely need:

- a 'lead' percussion instrument for you, the teacher, to use, to maintain a steady beat.
- a selection of percussion instruments for pupils, sorted into these four 'families of sounds':
 - 1) Claves, pitched wooden percussion, agogos
 - 2) Metal scrapers and shakers
 - 3) Shakers and tambourines
 - 4) Drums
- a copy of the poem below and a 'Names of Jesus' poster, either on display or copied on to individual sheets for pupils. (There are many 'Names and titles of Jesus' posters available on Google Images.)

You might also display a class globe and a newspaper with some topical headlines.

Part 1: A Child Waiting for the Light

To begin with, organise the children into four groups of mixed ability. Explain that Advent is a time when Christians are preparing themselves for Christmas, as well as looking forward to a future time when Jesus will return to make the world a better place. We're going to be using music and poetry to explore what that might mean and feel like for Christians.

Establish a 'silence signal', then give out the musical instruments, one for each pupil. Each group of children should have instruments from the same 'sound family' - wooden percussion for group 1, metal scrapers for group 2, and so on.

Spend time experimenting with making different sounds and beats. How many different sounds does your instrument make? Can you turn your name into a musical beat? ('Jess-i-ca, Jess-i-ca', for example). Go round the circle, with everybody 'playing' their own name and everyone else repeating it together. Encourage listening to each other and playing together.



Use this time also to teach three useful musical terms: *ostinato* (a repeated pattern or beats - a regular rhythm), *crescendo* (gradually getting louder) and *diminuendo* (gradually getting quieter). Use hand signals to practise making things louder and quieter together as you all play a steady beat.

Recap on the meaning of Advent, then explain that one of the many things people have called Jesus is 'the Light of the world'. What do we think that might mean? Discuss in pairs, and feed back. Then share this poem, written from the viewpoint of a young Christian who is very imaginative... and a bit scared of the dark. He remembers that Jesus was a friend of children and didn't like them to be bullied. Jesus could be quite tough too, when he had to be.

'A Child Waiting for the Light' - a poem by Chris Hudson

*It's dark, I'm lying in my bed,
With lots of thoughts inside my head
Of crawling creatures in the night,
And some of them could scratch or bite*

*That beastly hiding underneath
Has giant claws and sharpened teeth,
That monster just outside my door
Has glowing eyes and gaping jaws*

*When daylight dawns, and shadows flee,
The monsters hide, I'm safe and free,
But in the dark I start to moan,
Who'll be with me when I'm alone?*

*But Jesus said that to the end
He'll stand with me and be my friend.
If monsters come, then I suppose
He'd punch them hard upon the nose!*

Allocate a verse of the poem to each of the four groups. Set the task of reading the poem all through together. Each group stops reading aloud for their allocated verse, adding instead a musical accompaniment, as you (the teacher) provide an overall steady beat to keep them together. The suggested order is below:

1. Claves, pitched wooden percussion, agogo - for a ticking clock
2. Metal scrapers / shakers - rustling for the claws / teeth / jaws
3. Shakers / tambourines - edges rolled, for daylight, plus scratching sounds for last two lines
4. Drums - steady beat ('be-my-friend' needs a stronger beat), with a confused roll at the end

Afterwards, discuss: How does Light drive out Darkness? Jesus called himself 'the Light of the World', but what do you think he meant by that? How might (or might not) imagining Jesus thumping a nasty monster be helpful for someone who was scared of the dark? Would it be useful to replace a

scary image with a funny one?

Part 2: The People who Wait for the Light

Keep the four groups. Explain that Advent is a time when many people wish that someone would come and save the world from all its troubles, put things right and sort it all out. Christians believe that Jesus will come back one day and sort everything out. I wonder what we think about that? What sorts of people might need saving in our world today?

You might want to discuss this together, sharing some appropriate newspaper headlines and having a globe on display nearby for visual reference.

Then set a musical composition task for each group, along the following lines:

During Advent, if we could travel all over the world and hear what everyone was saying, I wonder what we would hear. Let's imagine we can. What will each group be saying, loudly?

Each group needs to generate some sort of repeated chant that says what they want, accompanied by appropriate percussion. Plan a performance, led by a drumbeat, in which each group successively plays their own chant, then stops, until finally they are all brought in by the conductor to play together. Allow some rehearsal time for this. Each group's theme runs as follows:

1. Some people live in a world that's unfair; they live in a place where they don't have enough food or medicine or clean water.
They want someone to make things fair.
2. Some people live in a world where they're frightened of being bullied, of having someone pushing them around all the time.
They want someone to make them feel safe.
3. Some people have made mistakes in their lives, and they know it.
They want someone who'll encourage them to make a fresh start.
4. Some people are mixed up and confused; they don't know what's right or wrong.
They want someone to show them how to live a good life.

Play the pieces, one group at a time, then all together. As the teacher, maintain a steady drumbeat, 'nodding in' each group to play their piece at the appropriate time.

Extension activity: What do we think Jesus would want to do for these people? Might our ideas form the basis for an 'answering' ostinato?

Part 3: Jesus, Light of the World

Explain that, at Advent, Christians look forward to a time when everything will be made right again. But they also look back to the time when Jesus walked on the earth. He fed the hungry and healed



the sick. He spoke out against the bullies, no matter how important they were. He encouraged people who had made a mess of their lives, and helped them to make a fresh start. And he spoke of a new way to live, loving God and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves.

So, for Christians, Advent is a time of hope. It's also a time to praise God that even though our world isn't perfect, Jesus is still at work in people's lives, inspiring them to feed the hungry, heal the sick, stand up against bullies and encourage the people who've made mistakes - and show how to live a better life with their words and actions.

Let's finish by creating the sound of praise that Christians might use - believing that the world doesn't have to stay like this, and that God can still use everyday people to make a difference, inspired by the life and work of Jesus.

Show the children a 'Names of Jesus' poster and encourage them to create their own personal beat for the name or title they prefer. Which names do they think might be the most important ones for Christians to use about Jesus, in the world we have today? The individual beats are introduced by your own steady drumbeat, and 'nodded in' by you, one by one, until all are playing.

Experiment with the effects of crescendo and diminuendo. If preparing a performance, you might want to turn this activity into a final crescendo, in which all the beats gradually turn into a repeated ostinato for the word 'Advent!' or another appropriate word or phrase, such as 'Messiah'.

Afterwards, discuss in pairs, then share which names and titles were selected, and why.

Preparing a performance?

Here are some possible introductions for the three sections:

1) A Child Waiting for the Light

For Christians, Advent is a time when Christians are preparing themselves for Christmas but also looking forward to a future time when Jesus will return to make the world a better place. One of the many things people have called Jesus is 'the Light of the world'. What do we think that might mean? Here's a poem written from the viewpoint of a young Christian who is very imaginative... and a bit scared of the dark.

2) The People who Wait for the Light

All around the world, people want the world to be a better place.

- People who don't have enough food, medicine or clean water
- People who are being bullied
- People who make a mess of their lives
- People who are confused about what's right and wrong.



These are the sorts of things they say...

3) Jesus, Light of the World

So what about you? What about me?

Advent is a time when Christians remember the things Jesus said and did, and try to do the same things. They want to feed the hungry and heal the sick, stand up against bullies and encourage the people who've made mistakes - and show others how to live a better life with their words and actions.

They ask Jesus for help, and get strength from praising him.

'Come into my life, Lord Jesus', they say, 'and help me to make a difference too.'