



On your marks

The story of creation is always an awesome theme to explore with children and families. It gives us a glimpse of what God is really like and how we and all the earth are meant to reflect his magnificence. Usually, we turn to Genesis to read how it all began, but other creation stories can be found across the Bible, including, for example, Psalm 8, Psalm 104 and Proverbs 8.

Get set

The following idea which draws on creation imagery from the book of Job (chapters 38, 40 and 42) may help those who are 'over-familiar' with the days of creation in Genesis to wonder afresh at the creativity of God. There are some amazing descriptions here of what God has made - it's like a Bible version of a nature documentary but where God, not David Attenborough, is the narrator.

You will need:

- some pliable hardboard to wobble for thunder sounds
- large sheets of paper and crayons/felt tips
- a picture of a hippopotamus

There is a retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible (story 233).

Go!

The background to these chapters is what has happened to Job in the previous part of this book. He is a man of God from long ago but one who has suffered terribly. He has struggled to hold on to his faith following a series of family and personal disasters. He has had friends who have tried to talk with him but their words have been largely superficial and unhelpful. Finally, God speaks to him out of a storm.

The question of why there is so much suffering in the world is a huge and important one that all of us ask - and there are no neat and tidy answers. God's response to Job is to remind him that it is God who is in control and that God is powerful. This is seen in all that he has made. Life is bigger than the length of time we live - suffering too needs to be seen within a much bigger time-frame than the years and events of our short lives.

1. Make sound effects and create pictures to translate the words of Job 38 into something you can see and hear. For example, use pieces of pliable hardboard to wobble, creating the sounds of the storm, as someone reads the verses from Job 38:1-3 to the group.
2. As someone reads the verses from Job 38:4-30, encourage your group to draw what they hear being talked on large sheets of paper, including: the earth, stars, oceans, fog, waves, sunrise, hills, seabed, light, darkness, snow, hail, lightning, winter, rain, deserts, grasslands, frost, streams and lakes. All this is a picture of God's power and God's gifts to us. God wants Job to

trust that God knows best.

Talk about:

- What does each of these pictures of God's creation tell us about God?
 - How is God trying to help Job with his big questions?
 - Which part of creation do you find most awe-inspiring?
 - Which part of creation tells you most about what God is like?
3. Job 38 and 39 consist of question after question reminding Job again and again that God is in control however bad things look at the moment. And then, in Job 40, God begins to speak very directly to Job to remind him that God made Job and not the other way round! Job 40:15-24 focus on one particular animal in creation - the hippopotamus. Using a picture of a hippo, talk about its amazing uniqueness. Here are 12 hippo facts to get you started:
- Hippopotamuses are found in Africa.
 - The name hippopotamus means 'river horse' and is often shortened to hippo.
 - The hippopotamus is generally considered the third largest land mammal.
 - Hippopotamuses spend a large amount of time in water - such as rivers, lakes and swamps.
 - Resting in water helps hippopotamuses to keep their temperature down.
 - Hippopotamuses give birth in water.
 - Hippopotamuses have short legs, a huge mouth and a body shaped like a barrel.
 - The closest relations of the hippopotamus are surprisingly whales and dolphins.
 - Although hippos might look a little chubby, they can easily outrun a human.
 - A group of hippos is known as a 'herd', 'pod' or 'bloat'.
 - Hippos typically live for around 45 years.
 - Hippos eat mostly grass.

Now read the verses together, relating the parts of the animal mentioned to your picture.

Talk about:

- What do you think God is trying to get Job to understand?
 - Which is your favourite animal in creation and what does it teach you about what God is like?
4. After this stormy conversation with God about creation and Job's part in it, Job finally speaks to God in Job 42. Read Job 42:1-6 together. He now realises that God is God and that God is in control. He offers a very humble prayer to God, saying sorry and coming back to a simple faith in the God who made him. Hearing from God himself has been the answer to Job's many questions.

Talk about:

- I wonder whether we all need to learn to listen more to God, rather than to bombard him continually with our doubts and questions.



- I wonder whether we all need to learn to be quicker to pray than to complain.
 - Do you think that looking at pictures and talking about the wonders of creation might help us to get a better perspective on some of our questions about God?
5. Looking back over what they have read and talked about together, suggest that everyone works out how they would complete the following sentence:

I trust God who has made the... and because he did this, I know he will look after me.

Some older children might also like to read Psalm 8 as a prayer to God that reminds us how, amazingly, God has given us the job of looking after his creation.