



On your marks

Lent is the six-week countdown to the mystery of Easter. Traditionally it is a time to get ready to hear again the story of Good Friday and Easter Sunday, which is at the heart of the Christian faith. Sadly, although there is so much build-up towards other events in life such as holidays, a special school performance or a TV series and even for some of the other Christian festivals such as Christmas, when it comes to Easter, this 'feast' can take even Church children's groups by surprise!

So why not build in the following idea into your regular group activities in the weeks running up to the Easter to help the group get themselves ready?

Get set

You will need a large picture of the Cross of Good Friday – A2 size if possible – which you need to cut up into seven large jigsaw pieces, which will fit together. Why not take a favourite painting of this scene and enlarge the pieces on a photocopier? Choose one that is busy with people. Maybe it could be a crucifix such as the San Damiano Cross, which has lots of figures all around Christ. You also need purple wrapping paper.

Go!

1. Explain to the group that each week you are going to start the session with a treasure hunt. There is something hidden in the room in a special packet, wrapped in purple.
2. When the package for the week has been found, open it slowly and introduce the first of the seven large jigsaw pieces. Each of these is going to help us get ready for the mystery of Easter.
3. Spend some time wondering about the piece of jigsaw for that week and the part of the picture that is showing. Allow them to guess all sorts of possible connections but also use the time to introduce some of the following background ideas about Lent – maybe one new idea a week?
 - When something important is about to happen, you need time to get ready.
 - The events of Good Friday and Easter are so important, that the Church has decided it needs six weeks to get ready!
 - The church often uses purple as the colour for getting ready.
 - People get ready in different ways.
 - Some people decide to spend more time listening to God in prayer.
 - Some people decide to give up something they normally like doing – like eating sweets – so they can remember that God's gift of Easter is the most important thing ever.
 - Some people use the time to think more carefully about the stories of Jesus as he travelled towards Jerusalem and all that is going to happen at Easter time.
 - Some people use this time to do something extra for others who are in need, such as going without a meal and giving the money saved to a charity instead.
 - The events of Good Friday and Easter are the most important part of what Christians believe



and are so mysterious that people need to set aside time every year to try and understand more about it and be ready for it.

4. As an alternative to the jigsaw idea, why not build up the idea of a countdown to Easter by adding items each week to a bare wooden cross and creating a *Lenten Cross*. Choose items to go on this that come from the events of Good Friday, e.g. a pair of dice, a spear, a crown of thorns, a purple robe, a cockerel, a bowl of water, a whip, a signboard, olives, bread, grapes etc. You could put on two items each week. Some churches use their old Christmas tree to create this Lenten Cross. Strip off most of the branches until you are left with a cross-like frame of trunk and two branches. Doing this can help children link the crib and the cross.⁵ Make this treasure hunt or tree-dressing activity a ten-minute slot at the start of each session on the Sundays of Lent. You could end the time with a short Lenten prayer that you could all learn together. Here is a possible prayer:

*Loving Father,
Help us this Lent
To get ready for Easter,
To come closer to Jesus,
And to love others better because you died and rose again for us.
Amen*