
SPIRITUAL JOURNALS

Using the Intrapersonal Intelligence in the Model

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Potter's Publishing

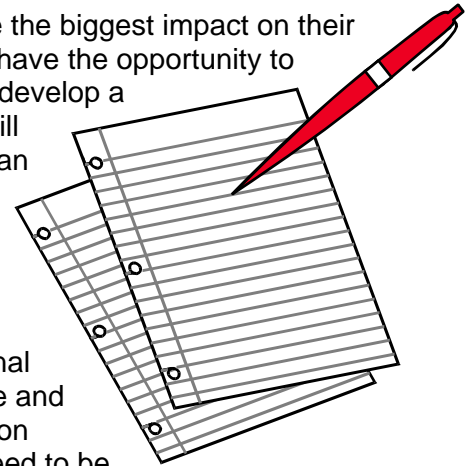
Each night when I crawl into bed – no matter how exhausted I am – I take time to reflect. Sometimes I reflect through devotions, sometimes I write in a journal, sometimes I just have thinking time, and most likely I'll pray. I'm sure many of you, like me, take some part of the day to reflect. We reflect on our days, the situations we've encountered, events of our lives, something we've read, or countless other things. We write about it, think about it, make plans, and pray.

What draws us into this process of reflection that often for me is way past lights out? Through reflection we derive meaning, put things into perspective, create mental order, make meaningful spiritual and life connections, and come to new understandings. Without it, we might muddle through life in mental chaos.

Reflecting is what Howard Gardner calls the intrapersonal intelligence. It is the process of going inward to create meaning for ourselves.

Children also need time to reflect and create meaning. Education values reflection as an important tool to aid in learning, understanding, and making meaning. In schools today, teachers are asking children to reflect in math journals, science journals, literature journals, and daily writing journals. Since children are reflecting in school on secular subjects, I strongly believe that it is important that they have reflection time in Sunday School as well. If we don't give children opportunities to reflect on their spiritual life, it could become something that contains no relevancy or meaning to them. Reflection on their spiritual understandings

could have the biggest impact on their lives. We have the opportunity to help them develop a spiritual skill that they can take with them into adulthood.



The intrapersonal intelligence and the reflection process need to be incorporated as an integral part of the Workshop Rotation Model. Spiritual Journals are one tool that can be used in the model for children to reflect on their learning. Spiritual Journals are personal journals in which children write or draw. While doing this, they reflect on what they've learned and transition that learning to relevancy in their lives. I have discovered that children who have written in Spiritual Journals through the elementary years are clearer on their faith. In our church, they are better prepared to articulate their faith when writing confirmation statements of faith later in junior high.

Children usually write in their Spiritual Journals at the end of a lesson as a way to make connections between concepts learned and their own lives. Carefully planned journal prompts are created and given to the children to make reflections through writing or drawing. These prompts usually emerge from the lesson as the concepts that you want children to understand and bridge to real life. For primary children, the prompts are more concrete in nature. It is important for children to know that if they wish, their journals could be private.

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Prompts for spiritual journal writing:

There are many ways that you can create prompts for writing.



1. **Prompts can be open-ended questions.** The following prompts emerged from learning that took place in several different workshops.

- *In our lesson we learned that David trusted God and relied on God for strength in overcoming his fears. Tell about one of your fears. Write a prayer trusting God and asking for strength in overcoming the fear.*
- *Write about a time that you treated someone like the raven in the story. What could you do in the future to respond in love?*
- *What did the little girl in the story learn about herself and her talent? Write about a talent that God has given you. How can you use that talent in a way that would praise God?*
- *Draw a picture of what the world might look like if everyone was a light to the world?*



2. **Prompts can be a stem starter:**

One thing I learned, one thing I feel is important to remember is, I wonder how, when I look at the cross, I remember that...



3. **Prompts can be drawings.** Younger children can draw to convey a response to learning.



4. Prompts can be poems, songs, or raps that reflect learning.



5. **Prompts can be letters to Bible characters, parents, or close adults:**

Dear God,

I am sorry that you had to start everything over. I know how you feel. Sometimes I have to do things over too. I wish I could do something. I will worship you forever. Thank you for saving my life.

*Love,
Noah*

Dear Mom and Dad,

We are learning about Good Friday in Sunday School. I get what happened on Good Friday but one thing I'm suppose to ask you in this letter is What's so good about Good Friday? Please write back and tell me.

*Love,
Brad*

Successful Journal Writing

For journal writing to be successful, children need to be prepared for writing. Journal writing is doomed for failure if you just give children their journal and tell them to write. The teacher needs to motivate the children by wrapping up concepts of the lesson, getting them to talk about the journal prompt, and by modeling and talking out loud as she/he writes in front of the children. This is what is known as a "cool-down" period.

Set the tone for the Spiritual Journal writing time. Turn off some lights or dim them if possible. Allow them to each find a quiet place in the room where they can sit or lay down on their stomachs with their journals. Have the children close their eyes and take some deep breaths.

Children could also be allowed to get with a partner and share their thoughts and ideas. Sometimes, this helps with the writing process. The teacher can also write lesson-specific words on a blackboard or flip-chart so beginning writers can refer to them. Most importantly, the teacher also needs to convey to the children that she/he thinks that journal

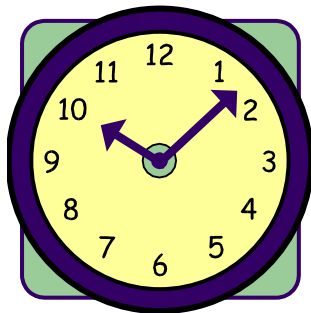
writing is important and why. Expectations for writing should be high. If you don't expect effort, you won't get it.

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Managing Journals

There are many types of journals that can be used. You can use spiral bound notebooks, file folders, pocket folders, or pre-typed prompts for a unit complete with a cover designed on computer for the unit.

I have found that the pre-typed and bound works best. It conveys to the children that this is important and it keeps all the prompts organized for a unit. It is important to include the date, title of unit, and prompt question on each page. It works to store the journals in bins by grade level or rotation group so they can be placed in the appropriate room each Sunday. Or, the shepherds for each group can carry them in their shepherd bags and distribute them to the children at the necessary time.



Time Constraints

Although it is recommended that children write every Sunday in each workshop of the unit rotation, it is not always feasible for reasons of time. If the

children are not given adequate time to write, they will rush through the process and the value of reflecting is lost. There are other times within a unit rotation that children can have quality reflective time. Journal writing could be done during an opening time or a closing time.

Spiritual Journal writing could also be done on Celebration Sunday. If you are not familiar with Celebration Sunday, it is the Sunday after the workshops in a unit are completed. All the children come together to celebrate the unit. On Celebration Sunday, just one journal prompt is used for reflection with all the children. The advantage of doing reflection time during the opening, closing, or Celebration Sunday is that adequate time can be devoted to it. In addition, there could be a whole group wrap-up of concepts. The teachers could talk about the prompt in relation to the concepts in the unit, and all the teachers would be available to help small groups of children with the process. The disadvantage is that the children will only be writing one time during the unit. So, it is therefore important that you choose the prompt carefully.

Journal writing with children is not always easy. However, with adequate time and motivation and preparation by the teacher it is a valuable way for children to grow in the intrapersonal intelligence and faith development.

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Joyce has 25 years teaching experience in public education. She has been a leader in developing integrated curriculum at the elementary school level and has taught it at the university level. Joyce brought the integrated curriculum philosophy and the multiple intelligences to the Workshop Rotation Model in its early stages of development in 1989. Joyce is actively involved in developing the model along with her pastor husband, Rev. Dr. J. Robert Claus, at the First Presbyterian Church of Morris, Illinois. Previous to this, Bob and Joyce were among the initial developers of the model in 1989 at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Joyce develops and writes curriculum for Potter's Publishing. She is also a charter member of CMA.