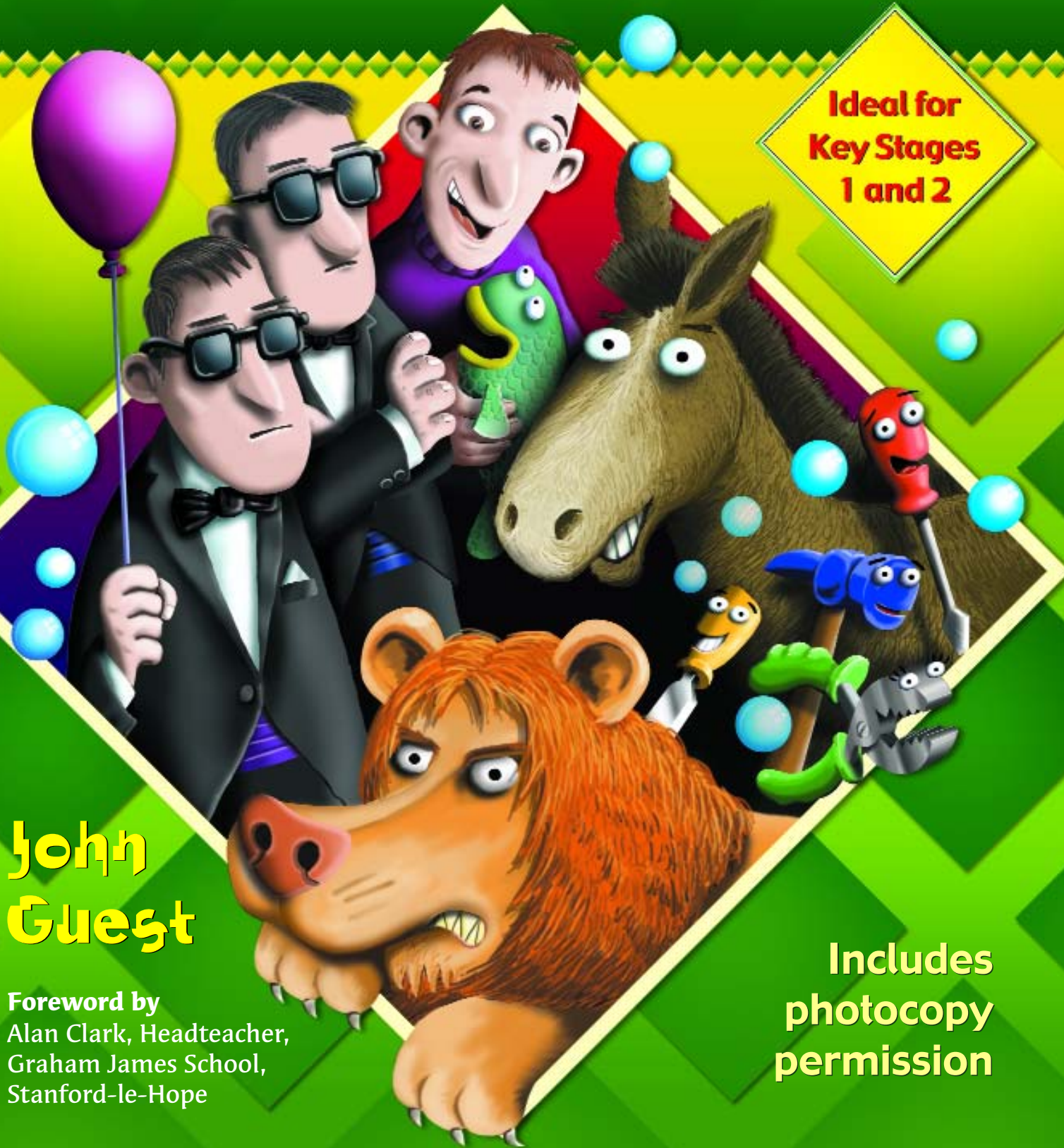


# Collective worship Unwrapped

33 tried and tested story-based assemblies for primary schools

Ideal for  
Key Stages  
1 and 2



**John  
Guest**

Foreword by  
Alan Clark, Headteacher,  
Graham James School,  
Stanford-le-Hope

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# Preface

Hello, everyone; welcome to our assembly! Welcome to *Collective Worship Unwrapped*.

Let me start by telling you a story. *Once upon a time...* a little girl stood at the gate of her primary school, welcoming the visitors one by one. 'Good morning, Mrs Jones,' she said. 'Hello, Mr Brown. Hi there, Miss Smith... Hello, God!' God, you might like to know, was me, visiting for one of my regular assemblies. It seems I made more than an impact on that little girl! I know that I don't look much like God and I'm not much taller than most primary school-age children, but I think there was an important point made in that little girl's conviction. When people like me go into local schools to meet classes and lead collective worship, we have the most incredible opportunity to make a difference. A head teacher I know once told me, 'Children are not vessels to be filled; they are lamps to be lit!' Those of us who work with children have the unique privilege of 'lighting lamps' when we form partnerships with our local schools.

The local trust I lead has the motto 'Building Bridges, Forging Friendships, Lighting Lamps', and this is essentially what we are doing when we meet with children, parents and teachers in our schools. The Balstonia Trust project (Stanford-le-Hope, Thurrock, South Essex) represents not just the convergence of need and opportunity in our schools but also the partnership we are developing between education, community and church. There is more on this and other contacts in the resource section at the end of this book.

There's a wealth of material currently available for all those of us involved in leading collective worship (or 'assemburly', as it is known to most younger children) in schools. However, as in so many areas, *what* you do

is not always as important as *how* you do it. With over a quarter of a century behind me, working in local primary and secondary schools, I bring to the study a certain amount of expertise. Not that this makes me any kind of expert. As you probably know, an 'ex' is a has-been and a 'spurt' is a drip under pressure. Nevertheless, I've discovered certain principles that may be fairly universally applied when working with children and young people and that most blessed of creatures, the teacher.

This book sets out in a simple way the areas that need to be focused on when considering school assemblies—the preparation, the environment wherein to 'perform' and how to use the material available. But, most of all, this book aims to show how to make assemblies *fun*!

By way of illustration, I've included a few of my own favourite assemblies. They are almost entirely original, although some of the inspiration for them has come from many sources and, above all, from the greatest storybook around—the Bible! Each section comes with a 'Bible link' to help ground the assembly in its biblical basis. There is reference to the suggested themes and an idea of what you will need to do the assembly. There is also a suggested prayer and a short selection of suitable songs. The key to where these songs may be found is on page 12. There are further suggestions of where to find help in the 'Resources' section at the end of the book. I very much hope that you will bring creativity and imagination to these assemblies and thus make them your own.

Enjoy the book and, above all, have fun!

*John Guest*

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# Introduction

This section includes ideas and suggestions for getting the most out of collective worship. However, the most important ingredient we can inject, apart from God's love, is ourselves! The important message of this book and others like it is that *we* are the bridge builders, the friendship forgers, the lamp lighters!

## THE PRINCIPLES OF PREPARATION

Good preparation is vital. Any carpenter, painter or decorator will tell you that half the task is in the preparation. Get your wood or your wall or your window properly 'prepped' and you save yourself a lot of grief afterwards. You can usually tell the job that was inadequately done by the standard of the finish. Any activity that involves interaction with children needs to be carefully planned and prepared for.

Take conjuring, for instance. A good trick will need to be repeated over and over again before being tried out in the public arena. If it is to have maximum effect, the practitioner needs to cover every eventuality, so he or she will often practise dozens of times, even carrying out the procedure with their eyes closed. The better the preparation, the better the presentation. And the better the presentation, the better the penetration!

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ENVIRONMENT

Nowadays, the society we live in is so busy and noisy that it is hard to find anywhere free from stress. Gordon McDonald, in his excellent book *Restoring your Spiritual Passion*, examines 'still times', 'safe places' and 'special friends' as three factors that can bring restoration. We would all recognize that school buildings need to be safe places. Open and public as they are, they need to be havens for the vulnerable. They also need to offer opportunities for quiet and reflection.

Most schools have a background of noise and busyness. Many of the children come from homes where stress is endemic. Noise and busyness are not all bad, but they are not everything. To be young *is* to be noisy and busy. There is so much to do, to learn and to

experience, and today's culture pushes young people to learn faster, sooner. Information technology makes learning easier and more accessible, and changing moral standards allow younger children experiences that the children of yesterday would scarcely have dreamed of. For these and other reasons, it is vital to create an environment as well as a message for children. This environment will need to be an alternative environment to the one in which they are growing up. Collective worship is not the same as religious instruction, so the context of a school assembly is at least as important as the content. This concept is not always fully grasped, although, where it is, the effect is powerful and life-enhancing.

Today's propensity for polyphasing (doing more than one thing at the same time) has eclipsed our need for sacred space. Worship areas have become 'multi-purpose' and the secular has invaded the sacred to the point where the latter ceases to have meaning. A 'post-Christian' generation no longer realizes that 'spiritual' really means 'other' and to be 'holy' is to be 'set apart'. This is sad because the very thing our debt-ridden, stress-infected, designer label-conscious society needs is 'somewhere else' to go, 'something else' to do and, of course, 'someone else' to do it with. Incredible as it may seem, 'assembly' may be one of the places where this can be achieved.

Collective worship, especially (but not exclusively) at the beginning of the school day, can provide a safe place where children can not only learn about God but experience him too. It's what Ofsted like to refer to as 'awe and wonder'. When we achieve that, we've struck gold.

Establishing a calm and peaceful environment in the area where collective worship is carried out is very important. School halls can often be adapted to create a positive spiritual environment. The establishment of the environment will relate very much to the senses, and the children will often respond positively to what they perceive as they enter the hall or designated classroom. If clear guidelines are established for what is acceptable behaviour in collective worship and those guidelines are consistently and sensitively underlined, then the 'otherness' of this time and space can be effectively communicated. Since assembly is also an ideal opportunity for notices (just like church services!) and also a chance to administer the 'telling off' where

necessary, the ‘otherness’ aspect may be a little compromised, but this need not be a major problem.

Here, then, are some suggestions for establishing environment.

### **What we hear**

This must come first as it will be the first sense impacted, even before the children enter. Music has a very powerful effect and should be used most sensitively. It can affect mood and attitude, and can enhance or destroy the environment right from the start. Music that is calming and relaxing is especially helpful for Foundation, Reception and early years children. Since first impressions are so powerful, the establishment of an environment that is different from where the children have just been sitting and what they have just been doing is very important. This is also a good reason why holding collective worship in a place other than where the children usually work is advisable.

### **What we see**

There is huge scope through this medium. Pictures, colours, materials and objects can all convey positive experiences. Lighting will also be an important factor and should be used creatively. Closing drapes and blinds can be effective in establishing a ‘holy space’, but there also needs to be an element of ‘openness’. Candles and fresh flowers can be very helpful. Lighting a candle is a very evocative act that the children themselves can be involved in. It can signify a moment of silence, reflection or prayer. Balloons and bubbles can also illustrate reflection or celebration. The overhead projector can display all kinds of images to enhance environment as well as illustrate talks and, if available, a video projector can display both still and moving images to enhance collective worship.

### **What we smell and taste**

Smell and taste are senses that we do not usually associate with collective worship... or are they? Collective worship may involve tasting bread and wine and, in some situations, the very distinctive smell of incense.

Be very aware that these senses are at work, and use them in a positive way if you can. The smell of school dinner wafting under the shutters at the end of the hall may produce a positive (or negative!) reaction in both the sense of smell and the taste buds, but will it help

the assembly? Although taste and smell may not be as important as sound and sight in establishing the environment for collective worship, they should still be taken into account. A pleasant or evocative smell in the hall, or an assembly that may involve tasting things, is certainly worth consideration.

### **What we feel**

This sense will be active throughout an act of worship and long after it is over. I am utterly convinced that worship should be an enjoyable experience and, as such, it will involve that ghastly phrase, the ‘feel good factor’. Put simply, if the children enjoy the assembly, it will be a good, positive and pleasant experience for them; if they don’t, it won’t! There are lots of factors associated with this sense. Perhaps thought could be given to how the children come in to assembly, where and how they sit and who they sit with. One of my local schools encourages the children to sit anywhere they like on the floor area, rather than putting them in rows by class or year grouping.

## **THE SKILL OF STORYTELLING**

The telling of a story may form the major part of an act of collective worship. Although it is probably true to say that storytellers are born rather than taught, it is also true that we can pick up a lot of the basic skills of storytelling and use them in collective worship. In this book you will find a number of examples of assembly stories that have been used frequently in local schools, and an indication of some of the storytelling methods that are applied.

Learning how to speak and to appreciate the value of words will help us greatly in communicating with children and young people. Here are some pointers.

### **Know your story**

Stories can be told or they can be read. If you are attempting the former, you will certainly need to have committed the tale to memory. If you are sufficiently accomplished, however, you will remember the highlights and use your imagination to fill in the gaps. Reading a story from a book can also have great value, although, if it is a picture book, you will want to find a way for the children to appreciate the artwork. Whether you read or tell, you will still need to prepare carefully. In most cases, the better the preparation, the better the story.



## Engage your listeners

A good story, well told, will always engage the interest of the listeners. Nevertheless, you may want to use a variety of techniques to enhance this engagement. You may use various types of audience participation, such as responding to various words or phrases in the narrative. You might wish to include various comic interludes, such as getting obvious things wrong and having the children interrupt with correct information. This technique is often used in pantomime: 'He's behind you!' ... 'Oh, no he isn't!' ... 'Oh, yes he is!' and so on. You'll find this used to good effect with the 'Yo, Henry!' response in the story of 'Honky the Donkey' (pp. 36–37).

## Repeat yourself

Narrative repetition is a classic technique used in storytelling and often appears in many of the traditional fairy tales. Think of the wicked queen's oft-repeated question to the magic mirror in 'Snow White and the seven dwarves', or the threefold response of the troll in 'The three Billy Goats Gruff'. Sometimes the technique of repetition is used to build suspense in a narrative: the children become more excited as they think, 'We've heard this before, we know what's going to happen!' There's an example of this technique in the story of 'Arthur and the magic fish' (pp. 71–73).

## Simplify the tale

At Clown Camp, they teach the KISS principle: Keep It Simple, Stupid! Stories don't need to be overly complicated. The best ones usually have a very simple story line and development. Think of Grimm and Anderson and their classic fairy tales. Think also of the simplicity of the parables of Jesus and a good number of the other Bible stories. Making stories complicated, with ever more tortuous plots and twists in the narrative, works well in the written and read format, but a story that is told needs to be simple. Keep it simple and you hold the children's attention. Make it complicated and they may soon begin to lose interest.

## Spice it up a bit!

The much overused phrase, 'Variety is the spice of life', is actually very good when you think about it. Variety saves us from bland mediocrity, and a good story can be ruined because it is just too boring and 'samey'. Spice can make a meal interesting, even surprising. Stories

can do that too if they are imaginative, creative and varied. Among the examples in this book, you'll find familiar stories told from an unusual angle. For example, 'Big, Bad Brian the Lion' is the story of Daniel and the lions' den from a lion's perspective, while 'The little yellow line' approaches the Christmas story from the point of view of a road marking!

Variety is not just important in the content of the story but also in the way we tell it. Vary the pace of the narrative and the volume and, like the piquant spice or surprising chilli you bite into in your meal, the story jolts the children's listening capacities and deepens their appreciation of the event. Try starting a story with 'Once (pause) upon (pause) a (pause) time (pause) there (pause) was (pause) a (pause) ...'. Or how about 'Once ... once upon ... once upon a ... once upon a time ... once upon a time there ... once upon a time there was a ...' and so on. See how variety can be used even in the simple classic start to a story.

## Stay focused

The most successful jokes work best when they have a good start and a humorous punch line. What you put in between is up to your own creativity and imagination. Similarly, your stories will need a good start and finish, and will progress between those two points in a disciplined way. A good start is needed to grab the children's attention and a good 'punch line' will, you hope, leave them thinking and wanting more. The journey between beginning and ending will naturally employ the techniques listed above but it must progress consistently. For example, in the story of 'Arthur and the magic fish', the weather must deteriorate consistently and the opulence of Isabelle's accommodation must increase consistently (albeit to a ridiculous level). This attention to details requires practice and care but ensures a high level of excellence in the telling of the tale. Focus in narrative should also ensure that we retain the interest and approval of the children.

## Smile!

You'd be surprised how much difference a positive attitude can make. Short or long, biblical or secular, tell your tale with vibrancy, passion and enthusiasm, and even the sorriest story will animate your audience and raise their interest levels significantly. Believe in what you are doing and project your enjoyment of the story and you will hold your listeners in the palm of your hand.

When I was younger and had a tendency to embellish my experiences with rather fanciful narrative,

I was told sharply, 'Don't tell stories!' I think what was meant was 'Don't tell lies', and with that I heartily concur. Stories, on the other hand, are not lies, even though many of them are not true. If stories had to be 'true', we would require Jesus to prove that the good Samaritan, the farmer and the prodigal son all existed independently of the parables in which they appeared. No—the fictional nature of parables and stories makes them no less valuable to us. They continue to be a vital resource in the communication of education, entertainment and encouragement.

## THE READINESS OF RESOURCES

When I first started taking 'assembly', back in the 1970s, you really had to make it up as you went along, coming up with your own ideas and trusting in the innate power of the story. Nowadays, I'm glad to say, there is a veritable treasure-house of material available to use with various age groups. Some of this, I'm pleased to say, you can discover within the pages of this book.

Most of the collective worship material available in book form has been written to be used. Provided you check your copyright cover, permissions and so on, it is fine just to go ahead and use it. It is well worthwhile taking a stroll around your local Christian bookshop and leafing through some of the resources that are on offer. The internet is also a very useful source of collective worship material: many Christian publishing houses and children's organizations have excellent websites. The Church of England diocesan children's and schools' advisers will also have much to offer.

It is, of course, very important to be creative in the use of other people's material. Anybody can simply rehash someone else's ideas, repeating parrot-fashion what someone else has put together. The best value gained from using someone else's material is to let it be a springboard for your own thoughts and ideas. Let's face it, you're never going to be able to do what the original writer did quite as well as they did it, because the context will be completely different. The stories and ideas gleaned from a variety of books are always better adapted to the local scene and the children you are addressing. It is only common courtesy to credit the originator of the idea where that is appropriate, but there is no reason why those same ideas should not encourage our own creative abilities to rise. Use the assemblies I've set out in this book—that's what they're there for—but don't just copy them verbatim. Use your imagination, your own adapted visual aids, your own voice characterization and so on. Your collective worship will need to be as individual and unique as the school you work in.

The best resource of all, of course, is the Bible. When I first introduce people to the Bible, I remind them that it is not actually a book but a library. There are 66 books in this library, all of them with their own particular appeal. The Bible is far more than just a storybook, history book, poetry book or theology book: it is a huge resource that encompasses all these things and a very great deal more.

Each of the assemblies set out in this book begins with a 'Bible link' so that you have a passage from the Bible to look at in preparation for the assembly. The reference is given for each passage, accompanied by an abridged text. Sometimes it is good to read the Bible aloud to children or to listen to someone else read it, live or recorded. It is also good to get the children to read aloud with you a portion of the Bible. Modern translations of the Bible are invaluable and it may also be helpful to look at modern paraphrases. The translation I use throughout this book is the Contemporary English Version (CEV). One huge resource on the internet is the website [www.bible.com](http://www.bible.com), which is operated by the large US publishing house Zondervan. I have found many fascinating pages on this site and a host of Bible translations in many languages.

Never underestimate the huge resource we have in the Bible! I never tire of reading it, especially now that I've managed to download the whole thing on to my PDA (that's a tiny little notepad-sized computer, for all you technophobes!). I even enjoy reading the passages I know well and the stories that are so familiar. Somehow, there's a new meaning, nuance or message to be gleaned every time. In this book, you'll find three separate assemblies based on the well-known 'Road to Emmaus' story from Luke 24, each with a slightly different emphasis.

The Bible itself tells us to 'do your best to win God's approval as a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed and who teaches only the true message' (2 Timothy 2:15). We owe it to ourselves and to the children we work with to become good students of the Bible, like avid miners, digging deep into it to unearth all the treasures it holds. But a word of warning: once you set yourself to examine and study the word of God, you will never be the same—for the Bible is the only volume I know that reads its reader.



# Big Bad Brian the Lion

## STORYTELLING METHOD

Telling a story from an unusual angle



### Bible link

*Daniel 6:16–28*

Darius ordered Daniel to be... thrown into a pit of lions... A stone was rolled over the pit, and it was sealed. Then Darius and his officials stamped the seal to show that no one should let Daniel out. All night long the king could not sleep... At daybreak the king got up and ran to the pit. He was anxious and shouted, 'Daniel, you were faithful and served your God. Was he able to save you from the lions?' Daniel answered, 'Your Majesty... My God knew that I was innocent, and he sent an angel to keep the lions from eating me...' The king was relieved to hear Daniel's voice, and he gave orders for him to be taken out of the pit. Daniel's faith in his God had kept him from being harmed...

## FOLLOW-UP

After the story, ask questions like 'What was the name of the man in the corner? Where can we find his story? Do you think he was frightened?' (Stress the fact that God doesn't always take away our fear but helps us cope with it. Real bravery is carrying on even when we are afraid.)

What things are you afraid of? Suggest a few—creepy crawlies, the dark, bullies and so on. Use this to lead into talking about bullies, if appropriate, and encourage children to talk to God, and tell their parents, teachers or an adult they trust, about any instances of bullying.

This is a good session to follow up with class work or circle time.

King Darius then sent this message to all people of every nation and race in the world: '... I command everyone in my kingdom to worship and honour the God of Daniel. He is the living God, the one who lives for ever.'



### Visual aids

- ❖ A lion. Use a balloon lion (see the resource section for suggested suppliers), a toy lion or the picture on page 125.
- ❖ You could ask an adult to look after the lion and afterwards give it to someone in the school considered especially brave.

Involve the children, with lots of faces, voices, changes of pace and volume.



### Main themes

Bullying and courage.

### Further topics covered

Fear, protection, prayer.



### Prayer

*Dear God, please be with us when we feel scared. Thank you for sending your angel to protect Daniel in the den of lions. Help us to trust you even when we are afraid. Amen*



### Songs

Be bold, be strong! (KS)

I'm not alone, for my Father is with me (SFK)

There once was a man called Daniel (KS)

Who's the king of the jungle? (KS)



Once upon a time, there was a lion. He was called Brian. He was very big and very strong and... and he was a bully! He thought he was bigger and better than any of the other animals in the jungle. Everywhere he went, he boasted about how clever and how strong he was. 'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!' he would snarl at anyone he met. 'RRROOOAAARRR!!!' And he showed all his huge teeth and his huge claws and his huge orange lion's mane.

The other animals were scared of him. I don't blame them, do you?

For instance, one day, Mr Giraffe was quietly minding his own business, chomping away at the sweetest, tenderest leaves on the topmost branches of the trees. Big bad Brian the lion crept up behind him so softly, so quietly, and then...

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!  
RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

Poor Mr Giraffe! He was scared out of his skin and ran off into the jungle. Brian just laughed.

For instance, one day, Mrs Elephant was quietly minding her own business, having a nice cool mud bath at the edge of the river. Big bad Brian the lion crept up behind her so softly, so quietly, and then...

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!  
RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

Poor Mrs Elephant! She was scared out of her skin and ran off into the jungle. Brian just laughed.

For instance, one day, Mr Monkey was quietly minding his own business, chomping away at a banana, peeling down the firm yellow skin to enjoy the soft white middle. Big bad Brian the lion crept up behind him so softly, so quietly, and then...

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!  
RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

Poor Mr Monkey! He was scared out of his skin and ran off into the jungle. Brian just laughed.

What a rotten bully!

Now, one day, Brian was swaggering

through the jungle, thinking how big and strong and clever he was, when suddenly... a huge net dropped out of the trees right on top of him, and several fierce-looking men with spears jumped out from behind the bushes. Brian snarled and roared and struggled and rolled, but he couldn't get free. The fierce men bundled Brian into a large bamboo cage on wheels and pushed him down the jungle trail. Before long, they came to a wide road that led them to a huge walled city, and Brian's cage was wheeled through the open gates. People on each side jeered at Brian and threw stones and rotten fruit at him. He growled and snarled and scratched but he couldn't reach any of them. In the middle of the city, the cage was pushed up to the edge of a great hole in the ground and Brian was suddenly tipped in!

It was dark and dusty at the bottom of the hole, and there were several other lions down there, but Brian was bigger and fiercer than any of them and they soon backed off. When his eyes grew used to the gloom, Brian saw a man sitting in a far corner of the hole. He had his back to Brian and his hands clasped together. He seemed to be muttering something under his breath. Here was Brian's chance to really frighten someone! Big bad Brian the lion crept up behind the man so softly, so quietly, and then...

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!  
RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

The man didn't move! He didn't seem to notice Brian at all, and just kept on muttering, his head on his chest. Brian was puzzled. This had never happened before. He took a deep breath and growled even louder.

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!

RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

The man still didn't move!! He just kept on talking quietly under his breath, his head bowed and his hands clasped tightly together. Brian took a huge deep breath. His eyes bulged! His great fangs stretched wide!! His huge black lion's mane stuck straight out from his head, making him look twice as big!!!

'I'm big bad Brian the Lion!  
RRROOOAAARRR!!!'

The man still didn't move!!! Suddenly, something tapped Brian on the shoulder. He turned round and found himself facing a gigantic figure over ten feet tall, all dressed in shining white with massive golden wings.

'MY NAME'S GABRIEL AND I'M AN  
ANGEL!!!'

Poor Brian! He was scared out of his skin and ran whimpering into the corner like a frightened little kitten.

And do you know what? I think it served him right!

**Ideal for  
Key Stages  
1 and 2**

## **Collective Worship Unwrapped**

**33 tried and tested story-based assemblies  
for primary schools**

Collective worship provides an important opportunity at the beginning of the school day to address the 'awe and wonder' part of learning. With this in mind, this book offers tried and tested primary assemblies with a Christian focus for Key Stages One and Two. Each assembly is complete and ready to run, with memorable stories, Bible links written in full, ideas for visual aids, helpful hints, prayers, suggested songs and follow-up material.

The assemblies cover a host of themes, some topical, some on moral and personal development, citizenship, or spiritual values, and some linking in to seasons of the Christian year.

Many of the stories use a specific storytelling technique (such as telling a story from an unusual angle, using a 'tag-line', repetition and audience participation), making this a flexible and practical resource, ideal for newly qualified teachers seeking to grasp the key principles of collective worship as quickly and as effectively as possible—but equally valuable for experienced teachers, RE co-ordinators and those invited into schools to lead collective worship.

**Includes photocopy permission**

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**An imprint of brf**  
ISBN 1 84101 371 4  
UK £12.99



9 781841 013718

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Illustration: Simon Smith & Simon Emery

Design: Louise Belcher

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