



Jonah and the Big Fish

(Jonah 1-4)

Tell

GAMES
LEADER GUIDE

UPPER
ELEMENTARY

Welcome

Welcome kids as they arrive. **Who has traveled somewhere, sometime? Where? What was it like? What was the best part? What were some tough parts?** Allow a few kids to fill in some details. **Today we're going to talk about the story of Jonah and the Big Fish. Jonah was supposed to tell God's story to the people of Nineveh, but he decided he didn't really want to go there.**

Even though it looked like Jonah wasn't going to tell God's story, God made sure he did. What's it like when you have a great story but you have to wait to tell people? Allow time for kids to respond. **What would you do if God told you to tell a story? Would you wait, or tell it right away?** Allow kids time to respond.

Whale Blabber

Set Up: Copy and cut apart the Bible verse strips from the Whale Blabber Sheets on pages 8-10. Look up a clip from *Finding Nemo* to hear some examples of whale-speak. If you are able, prepare to show that clip in class.

Activity Instructions

How did God make sure Jonah would go to Nineveh and tell God's story? (*God had a big fish swallow Jonah.*) **Let's play a game to have fun with this. We can't know exactly what kind of fish or sea creature swallowed Jonah. Lot's of people say it's a whale, so we're going to practice our whale-speak today.**

Scatter kids all around the room. Have them bring their Spark Bibles or Spark NRSV Bible Booklets with them. Explain the game. **I'm going to hand out a strip of paper with a Bible verse from the story of Jonah on it. Don't let anyone see it. The kid who gets the strip I hand out should get ready to speak whale. When it's your turn, read the verse like a whale.** If you have a clip of whale-speak from *Finding Nemo*, show it to the group. If not, ask a kid who has seen the movie to demonstrate. The rest of the group will listen and try to find the verse in Jonah. **When you find it, call out "Whale Blabber!" Good luck!**

Mix up the Bible verse strips and distribute them. Pick a random kid to start. Remind them that the slower and more exaggerated they talk, the better. Allow time for kids to find the verse in their Bibles or booklets quietly on their own or in small groups.

Try to do as many verses as possible, and play as long as time allows. Try to have all kids have a chance to read a verse in whale-speak. If you have extra time, shuffle the verses and start over.

Spark Resources

Spark NRSV Bible Booklets or Spark Bibles
Whale Blabber Sheets (pages 8-10)

Supplies

A video or audio clip of whale-speak from *Finding Nemo* (optional)
Scissors

After the game, gather the kids in a central location. **That was pretty funny and kind of hard sometimes. What made it hard to find the verses? What things seemed easy?** Allow time for kids to respond. **When have you tried to explain something to someone but they had a hard time understanding you? What was that like?** Allow kids time to respond. **We worked hard to tell God's story in this game. Like God did with Jonah, we pushed until people heard the story. Name two things you can do this week to tell God's story.** Accept thoughtful responses.

Spark Bible Ball Balancing Bonanza

Set Up: Make sure you have a clear space to play this game. This activity would work well outside.

Activity Instructions

In today's story, God used Jonah to encourage people to change from bad behavior to good. Sometimes the things God asks us to do are difficult, like telling someone they have to stop doing bad things. Other times it's easy, like telling people that God loves them. How do you share God's story with others? Allow time for kids to respond.

Divide the group into three teams. Each team will need one Spark Bible or other Bible. Explain the game. **We're going to play a game that might be easy for some people and really hard for others. But, remember, all of us just want to have fun. We're going to race from one end of the room to the other as if we're stuck in the whale with nothing better to do. We need to keep our spirits up while we're stuck in here for three days. To make the race interesting, you will need to balance a ball on a Bible while holding it with only one hand. Your other hand must be behind your back. If you drop the ball you must go back to the beginning and start over. The first team to get back and forth with every member wins. Any questions?**

Make sure each team has a Bible. Give the second person the ball and have him or her hold it on the Bible while the first person puts his or her other hand behind his or her back. **Remember, you have to keep the ball on the Bible all the way down and back. Ready. Go.** Let kids try the game.

Play as long as time allows. For an additional lesson, wait as long as you can, but if a kid is struggling, show him or her the trick of opening the Bible and putting the ball in the opening. Talk about the difference between the two ways of balancing the ball.

After the game, gather in a circle. **Wow, that was pretty hard, wasn't it? What made it easier?** (*opening the Bible*) **The Bible is filled with stories, isn't it?** (*yes*) **God's story is always there to help us, and God wants us to share that story.**

Thanks for all your energy and excitement today. Now you know the story of Jonah and the Big Fish, and you know that you can tell God's story.

Spark Resources

Spark Bibles or other Bibles

Supplies

Ping-Pong® balls, 1 per team

Whale Blabber

Jonah 1:1-2 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, “Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.”

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1:4-5 But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep.

Jonah 1:6 The captain came and said to him, “What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.”

Jonah 1:7-9 The sailors said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” “I am a Hebrew,” he replied. “I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

Jonah 1:10 Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so.

Jonah 1:11-12 Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them, “Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quieten down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.”
