

WEEK 1

LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

God works behind the scenes.

BIBLE

Scene I. Esther Becomes Queen:

Esther 2:1-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

LARGE GROUP TIME

Hi, friends! Welcome to *Behind the Scenes*!

This month, we're giving you an exclusive, backstage pass to one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. In this story, a young Hebrew girl has the opportunity to save an entire group of people! We'll meet characters like Mordecai, Haman, Queen Vashti, and if you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of someone super important who makes this production possible.

[Consider hyping kids up for this series by showing and having them sing along to "[Never Gonna Stop](#)" (Bright Ones) or "[I Cannot See Him With My Eyeballs](#)" (Hillsong Kids & Funny Man Dan).]

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

MUSIC | Worship

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** You can lead kids in worship with any songs of your choice, but here are some suggestions that go along with this month's theme. Make sure you have purchased any licenses required to play or perform these songs. For more information, [read this!](#)
 - "God is Real" (Vineyard Kids)
 - "Thank the Lord" (Arkkids)
 - "In You Alone" (Lifetree Kids)
 - "Raise a Hallelujah" (Community Kids)
- ✳ **PRETEEN HACK:** Consider adding these songs to your preteen playlist: "Background" (Lecrae ft. Andy Mineo (C-Lite)) and "Trust in You" (Lauren Daigle).

ACTIVITY | Ready, Set, Design!

- Hi, friends! Today is your lucky day: You get to be a part of the behind-the-scenes action of a cool play we're going to put on together. That means everything that happens on stage and backstage is gonna be you!
- Our play is going to be based on the story of Esther in the Bible. Every great play needs a name, so we're going to call ours . . . "The Epic Events of Esther and the Empire!" *[Or ask your kids what they would like to name the play.]*
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Lay out cardboard boxes, cardboard sheets, oil pastel crayons, acrylic paint, permanent markers, duct tape, and cutting tools. Divide kids into teams of four or five and have each team work on a component of the set (palace gate, castle towers, throne, windows, small house, tree, table, or chairs). To save time, you and your volunteers might consider designing the set in advance and just have kids do the coloring. Remember, this doesn't have to look realistic or put-together at all. In fact, the more imperfect, the better! Once kids are finished, add their pieces to the area of the room that will serve as the "stage" for this series. Check out [this kids' musical set](#) or [this black and white stage](#) for inspiration!
- Before we get into the actual play, let's do some behind-the-scenes work of designing the set — that's where the story takes place. Each of you will get into teams and work on designing one piece to add to the set.
- Ready, set . . . design!

ACTIVITY | Stage Prop Challenge

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Provide a bin filled with random objects (pool noodles, tennis rackets, serving platter, hula hoop, crown, and a drumstick). Divide kids into two teams. Give a prop to one team and have them come up with a use for the item, act out using it, then pass it to the other team who will come up with a different use for the item. Note that it doesn't have to be how the item is really used.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Have preteens be leaders in this activity and they can be the ones to help come up with creative ways to use the prop.
 - ✂ **SPECIAL NEEDS HACK:** To make this more accessible for kids with special needs, replace the large items with smaller sensory items (e.g., beans, beads, magic beads, etc.).
- The stage director is cleaning out the prop closet and has found a bunch of old props. They need help identifying which of these props are needed for this play.
- I'm going to take items out one at a time and both teams will think of creative ways to use that item — it doesn't have to be how the items are actually used, so have fun with your explanations!

POLL | To See or Not to See

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Go through the list below and add your own scary situations. Have the kids answer "To see" if they would rather have their eyes open or "Not to see" if they would rather close their eyes during that experience.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Instead of having preteens respond to the different scenarios, flip the script and have them come up with different situations where they might not want to keep their eyes open.
 - ✂ **SPECIAL NEEDS HACK:** Consider using simple hand gestures or sign language to have kids respond to each of the poll items.
- A famous Shakespeare character once asked, "To be or not to be? That is the question."
- **My question to you is, "To see or not to see?" Is it better to see or not to see when you face something a little scary?** Such as . . .
 - going down a rollercoaster.
 - when you hear hissing coming from a nearby tree.

- when you're standing at the edge of a diving board.
- when you have to use the restroom in the middle of the night.
- getting a shot at the doctor's office.
- when you think something scary is about to happen in a movie scene.
- when you feel a bug crawl up your leg.

SO WHAT? *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

SCRIPTURE | Esther 2:1–18 (Scene I. Esther Becomes Queen)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Set up your Bible story space like you are rehearsing a play with a director's chair in front of the stage area and the audience behind you. Create makeshift props to give the entire production a rehearsal vibe, like crowns made out of paper plates or a drumstick to use as a scepter. Choose kids and volunteers to pantomime the instructions you call out as you tell the story. Pick a few kids to be the story's characters: King Xerxes, Queen Vashti, attendants, Mordecai, and Esther. As you tell the story, pause occasionally to tell the actors to stand in a certain spot or move in a certain way.
- Welcome to an exclusive, behind-the-scenes experience. In just a few moments, our performers are going to be rehearsing a scene from our production!
 - *Optional:* Today's story comes from Esther 2:1–18 in the Bible. As a director, I find I should always consult the original material before I do my own interpretation. So, allow me to read it for you. *[Read the entire passage or selected verses.]*
- And now without further ado, our actors will retell the story through the art of pantomime — that means they will be acting out the scene without sound while I speak.
- I present to you . . . *The Epic Events of Esther and the Empire*, Scene I: Esther Becomes Queen.
- Places, everyone! And . . . action!
- The story starts in a place called Persia with a king named Xerxes. King Xerxes was very wealthy and loved showing off everything he had . . . including his wife, Queen Vashti.
 - Well, Queen Vashti wasn't always up for a party and strutting her stuff. One time, she refused to show up. She stood her ground, crossed her arms, and turned her nose up at the invitation.
 - So, the king got really angry . . . like, really angry. Show me some anger, buddy. Excellent!
 - When King Xerxes had settled down from throwing a royal fit, he thought about what to do with Queen Vashti.
- The king's attendants thought it would be a great idea to start searching for a new queen. They looked at each other and nodded energetically.
 - The attendants said, "Let's get all of the beautiful girls of Susa. The one who impresses the king the most will replace Queen Vashti!"
 - This idea made the king super happy. He jumped up and down. He clapped his hands. He did a cartwheel or something like it.
- So, the attendants went around the kingdom and brought all the beautiful girls to the palace.
- Cut!
 - Okay, attendants, this is where you round up all the girls. During the real thing, you're going to go out into the audience and bring up all the girls to the stage. Got it?
 - Okay, now, where's Esther? Great, I need you to stand at center stage. Perfect. Let's continue.
 - And . . . action!

- One of the girls who was brought to the palace was a young Jewish woman named Hadassah, also known as Esther. She was the niece of a man named Mordecai. Mordecai, you'll be entering stage right — your other right — good, come stand next to Esther.
 - Mordecai had raised Esther because she didn't have a father or mother.
 - Mordecai didn't think the king or people in the palace would be happy to know they were Jewish, so he told Esther to keep it a secret. He put a finger to his lips and shook his head so she could really get it.
- Well, it was Esther's turn to be seen by the king. Esther did everything she was told.
 - If they said, "Go to the king!" she would go to the king.
 - If they said, "Twirl around!" she would twirl.
 - If they said, "Do a curtsy!" she would curtsy.
- Everyone who saw Esther was mesmerized by her. She would walk by everyone and they would all faint because she was so incredible. And that included the king.
 - The king did a silly, happy dance and decided to make Esther his new queen.
 - He placed a crown on her head then pointed to the part of the palace that would become her new home.
- And . . . scene! Bravo, everyone!
- The king may have thought he found Esther and made her his queen, but there was actually someone else working behind the scenes to make all these things happen. **Can anyone guess who that someone is?** It's God!

BIG IDEA | God works behind the scenes.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Have someone acting as a director walk in with a megaphone and yell, "Cut! It's time for the Big Idea! Who has today's Big Idea?" Every week, the Big Idea, written on a piece of paper, will be placed at a different part of the stage. Choose a kid volunteer to find and read it aloud.
- This week's Big Idea is: **God works behind the scenes!**
- That is so true! We live our lives doing the best we can with the props, characters, and situations in front of us, but God has the script. God is always with us and knows exactly what's going to happen next.
- Let's say the Big Idea together to make sure we don't forget: **God works behind the scenes!**

VIDEO | Behind the Scenes, Episode 1

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Play this week's episode of [Grow TV](#).

STORY | Behind the Scenes

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a short story about a moment in your childhood when you didn't really know what an outcome would be. Share a few ways you can look back now and see how God was at work behind the scenes. It could be you had a teacher who was really tough or something in your life changed that felt really difficult. Begin with how it started and end with how it's going now. Even if things are still difficult, notice the places where you saw God taking care of you or helping you along the way!
- Although this was a difficult situation, I still saw God taking care of me and helping me all along the way.
- I didn't see it then, but now I know God was always involved because a lot of times, **God works behind the scenes.**

OBJECT LESSON | Hidden in the Scene

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Have kids try to find hidden objects in a scene using an image or a video like [this](#) one.
 - ✂ **PRETEEN HACK:** Use a stereogram image (like [this](#) one of a dinosaur) to show kids how there can be a lot going on behind the scenes. To see the details, start close to the image and slowly move back for perspective. Show kids how to find a 3D image by moving close and far from the image.
- Some of these hidden images were really difficult to see, right? But just because we couldn't see it, that didn't change the fact that they were always there.
- Mordecai and Esther may not have noticed the way God was working early in their stories, but they kept trusting God anyway. And they got to see God's hands at work — well, maybe they didn't actually see — but they knew God was at work because in this story, and in our stories, too, **God works behind the scenes** sometimes!

SCRIPTURE | 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13–17.
- It was probably really scary to be in the king's palace and around the attendants who decided to replace the queen. But God gave Esther courage in a very troubling and difficult place.
- Fast forward almost 1,500 years later, a man named Paul was writing letters to a group of followers of Jesus in a city called Thessalonica.
 - These followers in Thessalonica were so discouraged because life was hard. Many of them were being treated in really mean ways just because they believed in Jesus because some people had been spreading the wrong ideas about Jesus.
 - Paul's letter was written as an encouragement to the followers there. Paul reminds them of God's love, that the Holy Spirit is with them, and that they can have hope because they have Jesus.
- When we don't know what's going on, it's easy to be scared and discouraged. But we know Jesus is alive, so there's always hope.
- Jesus is working behind the scenes in our lives, too.

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

REFLECTION | Soliloquy Bubble

- A soliloquy is a theater word for a speech that is spoken out loud, but it's meant only for the character who's speaking it. I mean, everyone in the audience can hear it, but it's like we're hearing a character's thought bubble out loud!
- Let's think back and pick any of the characters you remember from today's story. **If you were this character, what might you be saying to yourself as the story is happening?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Buy a few dry erase boards in the shape of a thought bubble for your group. Sit in circles and take turns sharing today's question. Give kids a few hints by going first. Write on the thought bubble with a dry erase marker, then take a photo. Wipe it off and pass the bubble to the next person for a response and picture. At the end of the series, use these thought bubble photos as cue cards to make a video (TikTok, Reel, or similar style. Post only with parent permission.) or use an instant camera to snap photos to put up in your environment.
- Much like we can be pretty sure all of the characters had some real soliloquy-like self-talk even though it's not recorded in the Bible, we can count on the fact that God was at work behind the scenes in the events that happened!

RESPONSE | Behind the Curtain

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give each kid a curtain printable. On the inside, tell kids to write all the ways they know God is at work or ways they want God to be at work in their lives.
- God is so incredibly strong and powerful, and God considers all of us friends. **So, knowing that, how does this change how you feel about your life and the things that happen in it?**
- How do you see God at work behind the scenes?

MEMORY VERSE | Philippians 2:13 (NIV)

- **"For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Divide kids into groups of five or six and give each group a copy of the memory verse graphic (located in your Programming folder). Give the group some time to practice the whole memory verse. Announce each group to come up to the front with trumpet sounds, either from the rest of the group or play [this](#). Groups take turns reciting the verse in unison. Once a group recites the verse, have everyone say, "Hear! Hear!"
- **(Don't forget to also check out the memory verse signs — a combination of SEE and ASL — available in your Programming folder or at growcurriculum.org/Philippians2-13.)**

PRAYER

- God, thank you for always being at work behind the scenes, even though we don't always notice you are. Help us to remember that we are never alone in the things we go through. Deep down, we know we're safest and bravest when we're trusting you. Amen.

SMALL GROUP TIME

DISCUSSION

- Why was it necessary to find a new queen?
- Who was Mordecai?
- What was the secret Mordecai told Esther to keep?
- Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17. Who encourages us to do good?
- Name a few different kinds of work people do behind the scenes.
- Can you think of some ways God works behind the scenes for us?
- Why do you think God sometimes works behind the scenes and not center stage?

ACTIVITY | Mad Lib Critics

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Review the different parts of speech (such as noun, verb, adjective) that kids will need to know to do this activity. Kids will work in pairs to first fill out a list of words (without looking at the paragraph on the second page) before plugging it into the corresponding blanks on the second page. Have one partner read the words while the other writes them down in the paragraph, then switch roles. Once completed, invite kids to share their reviews out loud. For younger kids, pair them with a volunteer to write their ideas. Volunteers may also be needed to help kids understand the different parts of speech by using examples.
- Every stage performance is reviewed by a critic who writes their opinions about the play. We are all going to be critics today, but not the really serious kind. Let's work together to write a silly review of what we talked about today!