

Working on Worship 1

Creating a focal point



First impressions are important; this is as true in Collective Worship as anything else. When many children, staff and visitors come to Collective Worship, the predominant view is of the kitchen shutters, stacked chairs, PE mats, wall-bars and basketball hoops. For some, the venue is a classroom and the view is of tables pushed back and stacked with books and bags.

Creating a good and relevant focal point is an important part of making Collective Worship something different. **It is worth having a good look at your venue with staff and/ or your pupil worship team, if you have one, and discussing possibilities.**

A variety of relatively simple adjustments to the hall / classroom can be a huge help in enabling children and adults to sense the 'otherness' of worship and establish the right atmosphere for this part of the day. Whether you set up a permanent focal point such as a mural or one which can be simply moved into place each day, for example, a screen on wheels or a banner which can be tied to the wall bars, the effort will be worth it.

First impressions in two different primary schools:

It is always good to drop in on another school and see what they are doing so here are two examples to consider.

- 1. a powerpoint of slides is playing to music as children enter the hall past a display lit by spotlight and created by Key Stage 2 pupils to illustrate the theme for this half-term. Slides, playing on the projection screen (which covers the kitchen hatch), also draw children's minds to their theme. And above the screen, just in case anyone should miss it, the theme is displayed in giant letters painted gold and red by the Key Stage 1 pupils.*

- 2. a mobile screen stands slightly to one side of the hall with a large candle (unlit) on a low table placed in front of it. Pictures and prayers connected to the theme have been added to the screen by children. Everyone naturally focuses on a small choir of children singing as they enter the hall but when all are present, eyes turn to the mobile screen as a child walks across to light the candle and welcome everyone.*

Three common focal points with caveats:

1. a worship table with a candle and flowers

It is becoming the norm for church schools to have a worship table. The table is often covered with a cloth, maybe a coloured cloth changed to match the main liturgical seasons of the Christian Year.

But often the children at the very front are sitting too low to see what is on the table and those at the back are too far away because the objects are too small. The busy-ness of the wall behind the table sometimes detracts from its impact altogether and the table may not be used in any way during worship so the children stop looking at it or regarding it as in any way important.

Try a mobile screen behind the table to draw everyone's eyes to the table itself. Use a large candle and light it when children are looking. Choose bigger than usual objects which everyone can see. Think about how to help the smallest children see.

If you are in a classroom for Collective Worship a mobile board or banner, decorated by children can help create 'sacred space' – space set aside for worship. Or simply laying out a coloured cloth to sit around – a kind of 'pop-up' worship place.



2. a notice giving the assembly theme

It makes sense to display the theme of Collective Worship. It can give strong messages about what you are trying to achieve in school and allows everyone to contribute to the passing on of that message.

But if the theme is simply printed out on an A4 sheet, this is not big enough for everyone coming into that large dining room cum hall to see it at a glance. Size is important.

Try really large letters at least A4 size per letter. Involve children in creating the letters and hang them somewhere where they will hit people in the eye! Experiment with the best place to display the theme – ask the children's advice! One school put each letter of their theme / value on the side of a photocopy paper box and piled them up at the front. Very effective.

3. great displays of the children's work.

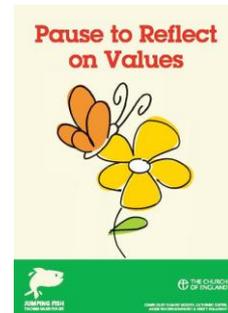
It is fantastic to have children's work on display in the Collective Worship venue; it celebrates children's achievements and lets everyone see good things happening in school.



But do any of the displays celebrate the assembly theme, helping children build on what they are learning as a school together. It could be like a working wall, and as your theme develops add items of children's work, good pictures, poems or sayings round the walls OR it could be more like a reflective area that classes visit to discuss the theme further.

A useful resource for 3 D displays based on Values for Life is 'Pause to Reflect on Values' available from:

<https://www.gloucester.anglican.org/schools/jumping-fish-publications/values-education/>



Introducing a cross (or other Christian symbols)

The idea of focusing in worship should be actively introduced to children.

Talk to pupils about how it is traditional to use something to focus on when having a time of reflection or saying prayers.

- On a table, try placing a selection of items one at a time - flowers, shell, cushion, teddy bear, photo or picture. Ask what each of these might make them think about. You may get ideas like 'family', friends, safety, nature.
- Next describe a 'cross' (or other Christian symbol). Create one instantly out of a ruler or some paper - something temporary - say how for Christians it makes them think of Jesus. What sort of things might Christians remember about Jesus when they see a cross? What might it challenge them to do? Is it a challenge for others too?



- Challenge children to design a cross for your worship table. Maybe each class could try this or individuals. There are good examples on the web and a particularly useful is the material on crosses at www.barnabasforschools.org.uk.
- Set a time limit for creating a cross and use the temporary one till then, pointing to it and maybe another object e.g. candles or flowers as things to look at while reflecting or praying. This challenges the notion that one always has to close eyes to pray!
- Eventually you will have a variety of crosses to use. But more importantly you have to use sown the idea of an object as something to focus thoughts and prayers.



Focal points for individual acts of worship

The following ideas have been put forward to try for particular assemblies:

- A choir of children singing at the front as everyone comes in.
- A video playing for children to watch as they arrive.
- A song or song words projected over images with children invited to sing as they arrive.
- A themed image with a question to consider.
- A spotlight shone on an object, a piece of scenery or a group of children 'frozen' in place for a later drama.



Images from Thurston, Hopton, Charsfield and Bentley Primary Schools – with thanks