

Journeys in the Spirit

Children



Sheet 40.A Gather Worship under the sky and other ideas



If the weather is fine and you have an accessible outdoor space you could have the Gather time outside. Once everybody has arrived in the Meeting House and sat together for a minute or two say that everyone is going to go, quietly, outside to the garden – or wherever – for worship together. You may want to take rugs or blankets. Once outside everybody sits quietly for a few moments. Then ask everybody to lie down on their backs and begin to look up at the sky. Ask some questions like:

- What colour is the sky?
- Can you see any clouds?
- What do the clouds look like?
- Can you see any shapes or pictures in the clouds?

Allow a little time between each question. After a little while ask everybody to sit up slowly. Ask questions about what they saw and what it felt like looking up at the sky. When everybody has had a chance to speak then go quietly back into the Meeting House for the next part of the session– this will be a good time to talk about Luke Howard.

Supporting children in settling down to gathered silence

For many children, Meeting for Worship may be the only silence they experience in their busy, noisy lives. While some of us may share some quiet with our children before a meal or as part of the bed time ritual, this is not universal among Quakers. So, we cannot expect children to know how to settle down and join together in worship. We may need to guide them. Guided meditation and prayers are useful tools.

See the side bar on page 2 of the main sheets for some suggested resources.

Guided meditation

The simplest way to help children settle down is to help them relax their body bit by bit and focus on breathing. Invite children to sit comfortably on their bottoms, hands resting in their lap. Ask children to breathe in through their nose, out through their mouth, slowly. Repeat this three or so times to the children so that they are well into deep breathing. Now you are going to help them relax their whole body, starting at their toes and moving up to their face. While they are relaxed from the breathing, invite them to breathe in, crunch their toes, and relax. Breathe out loudly after you say the word, “relax”. You will repeat this with each bit of the body: breathe in, tighten legs, relax – breathe out. Breathe in, tighten bottom, relax – breathe out. Children will likely copy you as you breathe out, which is what you are wanting. Move right up the body: back, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, face... Breathe in, tighten whole body, and relax – breathe out! Now invite the children to breathe quietly again, through the nose and out through the mouth. You may invite them to let their thoughts open to God, and then allow the gathered silence to grow.

Choose a delicate way to bring them back from their gathered silence. You might sound a quite bell or chime, or you may simply speak quietly and calmly, “Now that we are sharing the silence, I am now going to tell you a story...”. (See *Engage on the main sheets page 2*).

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Sheet 40.B Engage The story of Luke Howard

Luke Howard (28 November 1772 to 21 March 1864) : appreciating God's glory

Long ago, late in the afternoon on a hazy summer day, an 11-year-old boy stood on a hill overlooking the Windrush River in Oxfordshire, straining his eyes to see the hills on the other side of the valley.

Luke Howard had been going to school some years now in a large Friends' grammar school at Burford, near Oxford. Sometimes he liked to be away from the hustle and bustle of the school and his friends and admire God's creation.

Luke, who should have been at a table studying his Latin, was instead mesmerized by the changing colours in the sky. This haze had hung in the sky for weeks. Luke thought that this was odd. "It was not like this last summer," he said to himself.

At lunch, the sun stretched copper rays across the sky. Now into evening as the sun reached for the horizon, Luke expected the darkness of dusk to descend. Instead, the eerie copper-toned sky continued to glow.

Luke's eyes widened in wonder as he watched the dipping sun become a deeper red. Then it was gone. Instead of darkness, Luke was shocked to watch the western sky brighten. Where the sun disappeared, the settled haze started to take on a green opalescent hue. More colours gathered: a greenish yellow glow, a wave of pink, and a deep blue.

Luke stood entranced, scarcely breathing, as this panorama developed to full splendor before his gaze. Slowly the bright hues did begin to diminish, and finally dusk descended as he had expected. At long last Luke roused himself from the magic of the spectacle and slowly made his way back to his home.

He entered his observations into his note book. Since the previous year, when he was ten, he kept notes about what he saw in the immense sky. Years later, still with his keen interest in the sky, Luke learned how nature had created that stunning view. Two volcanoes on the opposite sides of the world blowing lava and dust, a fiery meteor flashing overhead and the shimmering aurora borealis (dancing lights in the sky) help form this natural spectacular light show that he had watched as a child.

For Luke that day was to influence the rest of his life, although he wouldn't have known it at the time. He did return to his Latin, and French, and maths and other school work. He studied hard. As was expected, back when Luke lived, he became an apprentice. Instead of going to school when he was a teenager, he learned a trade from someone who already was doing the job. In Luke's case this was a chemist, and so Luke got a job as a chemist. But going beyond expectations, within twenty years, by the time he was 35 years old, Luke had opened his own prospering chemical manufacturing laboratory.

His love of the sky never ceased. He continued to fill countless notebooks with observations, even as demands on his time grew. He was a well-respected man among Quakers, served on committees and travelled to meet many other Quakers. When there was an important decision to be made, Quakers asked what he thought. His business also grew and demanded his constant attention, but he would still take time to gaze at the sky. When he was not run ragged with his business, or spending joyful moments with his wife and children, he would paint what he saw. He was a good painter and people liked his paintings of wild and gentle skies with changing cloud shapes.

So it came to pass that among all he did, his first passion was the sky. So perhaps it was not surprising that Luke Howard wanted to share this passion with others and talk about the many changing shapes of the clouds. So he thought hard, how could clouds be described and came up with an idea. Using a language many in his time knew, Latin, Luke gave names to changing cloud patterns. Even now, nearly 200 years later we still call the clouds by the names Luke Howard thought up so long ago.

(See Sheet 40.C for pictures and names of clouds).

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Sheet 40.C

Engage

Cloud pictures

Here are some pictures with names in Latin and English of four of the basic clouds identified by Luke Howard.

Cumulus – heap



Stratus – layer



Cirrus - curl of hair



Nimbus – rain



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Sheet 40.D

Respond

Craft ideas

Luke Howard had many interests. What interests exist among the children in your Meeting?

Here are some craft ideas that could be done after the telling of Luke's story to facilitate worship and to give opportunities for children to respond to the story.

The ideas can be used over a number of Meetings to create a collage, or you can be selective and use one idea in for a single Meeting for Children's Worship. How the finished collage looks is less important but if it can be displayed, it can be a stunning reminder that children are very much part of your Meeting. See *Sheet 40.F* for suggestions to include babies and toddlers.

Resources: For individual creation: A4 or A5 white paper, scissors, colour pencils, dark marker pen. If building a group collage creation, add large sheet to cover wall (e.g. wall paper underlay), scissors and glue.

Rainbows

Provide children with A5 or A4 sheet paper. Invite them to draw a large rainbow. Colour order is not important but for those who like to be exact, the order is red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. On each bow (colour) invite the children to write or draw something they enjoy or are good at. Invite them to cut out their rainbow and paste on sheet. For the younger, who simply scribble their colours, an adult might engage a discussion about what they like, and encourage them to draw that, too. Allow them to create what they are lead to create and if safe to do, let them cut and paste on the communal sheet, too.

Add clouds or a tree, flowers, sun rays, etc. Or as an alternative to rainbows ...

Invite each child to create a flower with large petals. Or a single cloud of their own shape. Or leaves to add to a tree the children have created on the collage. As these are completed, they can be added to the large paper, creating one collage. Older children might draw or paint particular scenery right onto the sheet.

On each petal in their flower, or on a their leaf or leaves, or on their cloud, invite them to write or draw a response to one of the following questions, e.g. What do they like about themselves? What do they enjoy doing? What would they like to learn? What do they dream about becoming? What hobby do they enjoy doing which they would like to do with or teach others? You might think of questions appropriate for the children in your Meeting.

Stars

Luke Howard was a well respected Friend. Invite the children to make large stars and in each draw or write the name of a person who is special to them, living, dead, real or fictional.

Group activity following the rainbow creation, for a group who knows each other well.

Once children have made their rainbows, they add their name on their sheet. Each child then needs a dark marker. Invite them to sit in a circle and pass their rainbow to the person on the right, who using a dark marker that will appear over all the colours on their rainbow, writes or draws what they like about the rainbow creator the person's who name is on that sheet. Keep passing the rainbows around so each person can write or draw on each person's rainbow. If you have a large group, greater in number of colours on the rainbow, pictures or notes can be made around the rainbow.

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Sheet 40.E

Respond

Conversations and games

Remind children that during Meeting for Worship we all listen, there is silence between speakers and this is not a time to ask questions or comment on what is said.

Photos

Invite children to bring a photo of themselves. (Be prepared for children who do not bring a photo. Have a basket of images of children and invite the child to choose one which reminds them of themselves.) Invite children to show their photo and, when they feel comfortable, to speak about what is special about themselves in that particular photo. Gently, encourage silence between each speaker.

Personal item

Instead of a photo, invite children to bring in a special toy or item. As above, invite children to show it and speak about what is special about it and how it relates to who they are.

Identifying with images

Provide a variety of images including some of nature, action shots, animals, places, people.

Invite children to gaze upon them and choose one or two. When sitting again in gathered silence invite children to take turns to share what drew them to the image they now hold.

I am like... game

Have a cloth bag of items (more than the number of children). These can be a selection of natural items, unbreakable nic-nacs, or other easily found items in your house.

Taking turns, each child pulls an item out of the bag and says, "This is like me because I am" This can be played more than once with the encouragement that children find different descriptions of themselves.

An observation game, "Kim's game"

Luke Howard was very observant, how observant are you and the children in your meeting? Have a tray with a variety of small natural objects. Invite children to look at them for one minute. Then cover the tray. How many can they remember? Go in a circle, each child naming an item. Children can give clues to help each other remember, as needed.

If I was a cloud I would be...? Just ask the question and wait for the answers – maybe do it outside.

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Children

Sheet 40.F

Some thoughts about engaging the under fives

“At different intervals, our Meeting had a child a few years younger than the rest, e.g. a two year old with a group of children five-plus. We would have an extra adult in the room who would sit next to this pre-school child and support him or her in the Meeting for Children’s Worship, including joining in the gathering silence, watching the candles being lit, listening to the story, participating in the Response activity, which we ensured was a hands on activity that allowed for discussion, so as to cater for different ages and abilities. We were respectful that all children, what ever their age like to be heard.

When we began using “Way of the Child”, a style which encourages worshipful activity at different stations (See *issue 35 Sheet 35.C* for seven suggested reflective focuses or stations that offer a variety of ways for leading children to interior silence.)

We welcomed a baby but had no pre-school children present. The baby was soothed by the rhythm of the story telling and welcome at the stations: sand play with rocks; gazing with a candle or another object to focus on (easily grabbed!); craft table with paints and paper. The peace and calm of the worshipful mood relaxed the baby and her mother.

Even before using “Way of the Child” the babies enjoyed watching candles flicker and having cuddles, soft toys, holding felt and touching natural items. We were well aware that at this age, exploration is through the mouth, so had large washed stones held by the adult, touch by the baby which could be licked but not put in mouth!

The varied stations in “Way of the Child” were appropriate for short concentration spans of a toddler and the slightly older pre-school children, who were each supported by an adult.

In a single focus activity, toddlers and the slightly older pre-school children liked to be involved with the “big” children, using similar craft items but in different ways. Our focus with all, whatever the age, is on the worshipful process, not creating an item for after Meeting “show and tell”. Popular among our toddlers were sticking and gluing, pounding and squishing play dough or clay, and scrunching or cutting paper and tugging at balls of wool . We explained the importance of safety to all the children, with extra attention given to putting scissors back in the basket when not in use. During story telling, ‘fidget items’, natural items like stones, feathers and shells on a blanket kept the attention of the these young children, although they would join in the quiet sitting, too, for possibly a shorter time, with the “big children”.

In Meetings with larger numbers of babies or pre-school children, the welcoming atmosphere created by people in the Meeting House toward the children, and the peace and calm of worshipful times together had more influence than the activity of producing works of art, stunning dramatic performances or following rules during co-operative games.

Furthermore, children in our meeting have reported that the biscuits or favourite fruit after Meeting for Worship, was significant in their experience of Meeting. So we provided appropriate rusks for babies or welcomed them to be fed – bottle or breast – during the after Meeting tea time.”

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