



VBS: Are You Ready?

By Dan and Melissa Woltmann

As the snow and ice falls and cold winds blow it is hard to imagine that Vacation Bible School is only a few months away. Perhaps you haven't even thought about VBS yet...time to start preparations!! There are many publishing houses that provide entire kits with everything you will need – teacher and student books, skits, games, puppets, theme decorating ideas and even snack suggestions. But you do not need to solely rely on these publishers to have a successful VBS.

VBS Options

- **Entire kits.** While this may sound like a good idea, many times they are not cost effective. Under or over estimating the number of children can leave you with too many books for one class and not enough for another.
- **Reproducible kits.** There is at least one company that we are aware of who provides an entire theme-based kit with all the ideas needed for those who need extra help as well as student materials that are reproducible. This type of program eliminates left over and wasted materials. Simply copy the number of pages needed each night. The draw back is that you may pay for more information than you will probably use.
- **Groups.** There are many groups such as Neighborhood Bible Time and, now, several Bible colleges, who will conduct VBS for your church for a fee. This option may be good if you are short on workers or just want a change.
- **Do-It-Yourself.** For those with a few kit VBS' under their belts you may want to attempt a VBS without kits. This is actually the most effective VBS, both spiritually and financially. YOU establish the lessons since you know your kids the best.

Reminder: If you choose to use one of the prepared kits, be certain to ask for a sample of each class before you purchase. We have found problems with some of the more familiar stand-bys:

- 1) Lessons are watered down - more "fluff" than substance;
- 2) Materials are questionable when it comes to Bible versions including references in teacher's materials (little foxes);
- 3) You MUST request KJV from all the distributors of VBS materials.

Since those who use the prepared kits tend to stick to the program, we will focus on the do-it-yourselfer. Those who prefer kits may want to take some of these ideas and adapt them to their kit-based VBS.



Who – Leader. It is important who plans the VBS. Preferably, you will want someone who works well with 3rd grade and above. We have found that when those who primarily work with the K-2nd graders are the VBS leaders the lessons and activities tend to be aged down causing a problem with discipline and participation by the older children in the church.

When. If your pastor has not assigned a week of VBS, you will need to approach him with at least 3 different weeks to choose from for your VBS. This will help him as he checks the schedule for any potential conflict. When choosing these weeks keep in mind school closing and starting days; severe weather during the school year could cause a late summer closing. Also, keep in mind your church members and community. If you have many factory workers who take a mandatory week off during the summer, scheduling that week will find you with low attendance due to out of town families. You may also run into attendance issues due to sports in the early weeks of June.

Theme. Ideally you will want a theme in which you can have two opposing teams. Hillbillies – Hatfield’s vs. McCoy’s. Rescue Heroes – Police vs. Firemen. Olympics – Red vs. Blue. Baseball — Nationals vs. Americans. You can also come up with a slogan for the week: “Searching God’s Word” – Super Sleuths & Private Eyes. “God’s Boot Camp” (using Ephesians 6) – Army & Navy. You are only limited by you imagination.

Who – Workers. It is important to have many, many, many.... There can never be too many workers. Faithful workers are a testimony to the children that they truly are valued and loved.

Organization. You will need to determine if you will have individual classes or more of a revival or preaching style service. The kits tend to stick with breaking up the children into small classes. If you are trying to build unity in your group, this will be difficult if they are not together. We have found that breaking into two main groups, K3-5 and 1st– 6th grade, goes extremely well. Even if you have over 100 children, the schedule will work as long as you have enough workers.

Schedule. This is a sample schedule that we have tweaked constantly over the years. The schedule is for 1 ½ hours. If you conduct a 2 hour VBS simply add minutes to the desired areas. Plan for 5 minute transitions when moving from point to point.

- 6:45 – **Check In/Registration.** This time is for point taking, signing up visitors to teams and any other “business” necessary before VBS. Workers are needed for crowd control and business.
- 7:00 – **Opening.** The basic “pump ‘em up” time. Puppets, skits, songs, offering, silliness and announcements. Workers needed for crowd control and any skits or program. K 3-5 class can be dismissed just before the Bible lesson. We will address this later.



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- 7:10 – **Bible lesson.** Thirty (30) minutes for the Bible lesson is more than most kits allow. We conduct this time very much like a “preaching” service. We allow enough time to also have an invitation which is first done on the third and successive nights of VBS. **THIS IS THE REASON FOR VBS!** Workers are needed for crowd control and the invitation.
- 7:40 – **Bible verse time.** Verse memorization is something that is sorely lacking in many kit programs; it may be included but there simply isn’t enough time to effectively accomplish it. Keep the verses simple. Workers are needed to break the main group into smaller units. Workers listen to the children say the verses and help younger ones learn them. When the students learn their verses they have earned the privilege of receiving a crossword or word search puzzle to complete. These are specially created to include review of the message, verses and happenings of the week. (Instructions for these puzzles are included in a separate article.)
- 7:50 – **Game Time.** Primarily outside games. Plan for 3 games but do not worry about getting them all in. If a game is working, stick with it; if one doesn’t work, move to another. Also, have alternate plans in case of inclement weather. Word searches, crosswords and the like are a good way to fill time if it is raining. Many Bible game books have some that can be theme related.
- 8:15 – **Closing.** Announce the day’s winning team, make final announcements, and open the Bible Buck store. K 3-5 can opt to rejoin the main group at this time.
- 8:30 – **Dismiss.** Be prompt; parents appreciate this.

K 3-5 Schedule. We generally like for the usual K 3-5 Sunday school teacher or Wednesday evening teacher to be the teacher for VBS. We have found that children who have been reluctant to attend other age related classes continue to attend their “new” class after VBS feeling more at ease because they are familiar with their teachers. We make sure they know the theme, verses and 1st–6th grade schedule so that they can plan accordingly on the age level needed. They are responsible for a lesson, verses, craft, snack and game times as well as their own “Bible Buck” store. However, in recent years we have found that many of our K 3-5 groups have been very well-behaved during the lesson with the older group. If you have a well-behaved children, your K 3-5 group may wish to stay for the lesson and dismiss afterwards.

Activity. Games need to be simple, fun and physical. Look for group games, relays, etc. that can be easily changed to suit your theme. You may also want to consider something special each day. We do two things: an indoor cardboard and duct tape Maze and Hidden Bible Bucks. The **Maze** is simply constructed and easily torn down; space is needed to spare. The **Hidden Bible Bucks** (high “dollar” denominations) are placed somewhere on the church property that the children are allowed access. A word or phrase is given at anytime during the evening as a clue; time is then given before and after VBS and during Game Time to “search”.



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Tip: Multiple ones are hidden just in case someone finds one early on; all the clues correspond to each one hidden. This special activity can be as simple and elaborate as you like. We have found that on the years we do not conduct a Hidden Bible Buck search, we hear about it from not only the children but the workers!!

“Bible Buck” store. A simple store with novelty items – from catalogs or thrift stores. Children earn “Bible Bucks” (theme related dollar bills created on a publishing program) for everything from attendance, saying verses, answering trivia, or anything else the leader decides. Bible Bucks are sometimes doubled for no reason at all. Be as generous as you like just be sure to price accordingly in the store. High prices are the rule early in the week; HUGE “sales” on Thursday and Friday. **Note:** If you notice something the kids really like you may need to adjust the cost so that you do not run out.

“But, you left out ...”

- **Craft Time.** We understand that children need to feel they can accomplish something on their own. However, over the years we have witnessed the projects becoming more elaborate and taking away valuable lesson time OR teachers completing the projects defeating the purpose. Believe us, the kids do not miss the crafts! This is also another money saver.
- **Snack Time.** Snack time isn't really necessary. It is only 1 ½ hours; they will survive. We make sure that water is available. If you believe that snack time is a must, we suggest having snacks available AFTER dismissal. We have done this from time to time and it works great. This will allow for fellowship each night; those that need to leave can grab the snack and go. You will need to decide if you will include adults in the snacks. You will need workers to prepare and serve.
- **Materials.** While not listed, we vary this from year to year based on theme. Thanks to today's home publishing programs we can form booklets which include each day's verse and lesson topic as well as an attendance, visitor and verse check sheet for Check In. When designed around the theme the kids have a wonderful reminder of the week's verses and lessons.

Miscellaneous Information. You will want to take advantage of all the talents in your church. If you have someone with artistic abilities have them create your back drop or decorate. Encourage teens to assist by setting up games, listening to verses, and helping with skits, puppets or snacks. This is a great service opportunity for them.

These are just a few ideas to get you out of the “kit” rut that so many may find themselves. You might like to try them all or just a few. The choice is yours; you are only limited by your imagination. You know your youngsters, what they need and where they are spiritually. Remember, the focus is reaching children for Christ. Keeping that thought at the center of whatever you do in VBS will create a successful VBS.

** Dan and Melissa have conducted both kit and do-it-yourself VBS' since 1993. Since 1996 they have predominately used the do-it-yourself avenue for all the VBS' they have conducted.

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