

Jonah and the Big Fish

Sit quietly while the story forms within you. Slowly take the tan underlay, unfolding it carefully, place it on the floor in front of you but slightly off-center to the left.

Once, a man named Jonah heard God speak.

Present Jonah and place him in the center of the circle.

God told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh.

Place the city of Nineveh to your left. Turn Jonah to face the city of Nineveh. Place the people of Nineveh around the city.

God told Jonah to cry out to the people of Nineveh and tell them they need to change their ways.

Turn Jonah away from Nineveh and move towards the opposite side of the underlay, to your right.

Jonah didn't listen to God. He didn't go to Nineveh. He went the other way, to a place called Joppa, where he got on a boat to go far away from Nineveh.

When you say Joppa, lay out the dark blue round underlay to slightly overlap the tan underlay. Place the boat on the water facing the opposite direction of Nineveh, then place the sail on the boat. Put Jonah in the boat, lying down. Place the captain and sailors in the boat. Place cargo in the boat.

There came a great wind and storm, with huge waves.

Place the waves on the blue underlay in front of the boat. Stagger them but place them close enough to each other to be able to knock each one over when one is pushed over (as in the domino affect).

The storm scared the sailors. They were afraid the boat would sink so they threw all the cargo into the sea to make the boat lighter.

Remove the cargo and drop it over the side of the boat, to the left so the children can see.

Jonah was asleep. The captain and the sailors were afraid.

Move the captain and the sailors near Jonah.

They woke Jonah and asked him why there was this big storm.

Stand Jonah up to face the captain and sailors.

Jonah told them God was mad at him and he told them they should throw him into the sea.

The sailors did not want to throw Jonah into the sea. They tried to row the boat to shore but could not.

Pretend that you want to turn the boat toward the shore but cannot. Give up after a failed attempt.

The sailors did not want to hurt Jonah, but they were afraid of the storm, so they prayed for him and threw him into the sea.

Take Jonah out of the boat and place him on the blue underlay between the boat and the large waves.

Immediately the storm ended & the waves calmed.

Flatten the large waves so they all topple over and lay flat.

The sailors were grateful the storm was over and they prayed and thanked God.

God sent a big fish to swallow Jonah.

Introduce the big fish and place Jonah in the fish's mouth.

Jonah stayed in the fish's stomach for 3 days and 3 nights. While he was in the belly of the fish, he prayed to God.

God made the fish spew Jonah out on dry land.

Turn the fish towards the tan underlay and remove Jonah and lay him on the 'land.' Then stand Jonah up, facing Nineveh.

Jonah was near Nineveh.

God told Jonah to go tell the people of Nineveh to change their ways, to do good things.

Move Jonah near the city and repeat God's message as if your heart really isn't in it.

Jonah went into the city to share God's message saying, "You need to change your ways. You need to stop making bad choices. You need to do what is good."

Turn people of Nineveh towards Jonah.

The people listened to Jonah and they believed his message. Everyone prayed to God, from the oldest person to the smallest child.

Present King figure and place him in the midst of the people near Jonah.

The King made a law that no person and no animal was to eat or drink anything. They were all ordered to pray. He ordered the people to do only good things and to pray for God to forgive them.

Cup your hand over the city of Nineveh and the people to indicate God's blessing and forgiveness.

And God listened. God was full of great love and forgiveness.

(It is important to say "Love" before you say "forgiveness" so children will not inadvertently internalize an understanding that God's love is dependent upon what we do or do not do. We want to ensure they understand that God's love is unconditional. Reversing this word order may send the wrong message.)

Sit back and look to the children for the time of wondering.

- *I wonder what it is like to hear from God.*
- *I wonder what it was like for God to tell Jonah to go somewhere he didn't want to go.*
- *I wonder what it is like to ignore God.*
- *I wonder if someone could ever, really, run away from God.*
- *I wonder what it felt like to be in the storm.*
- *I wonder what it was like to be swallowed by a fish.*
- *I wonder what it was like to be in the fish's stomach.*
- *I wonder what Jonah said to God when he prayed.*
- *I wonder what Jonah thought when the fish spewed him out on dry land.*
- *I wonder what Jonah thought when he realized he was close to the city of Nineveh.*
- *I wonder what made the people of Nineveh listen to Jonah and change what they were doing.*
- *I wonder how Jonah felt about the people of Nineveh.*
- *I wonder what the people of Nineveh felt about Jonah.*
- *I wonder how Jonah felt about God.*
- *I wonder if you wonder some things about this story.*

Scripture focus for this story: Jonah 1:17-2:1, 2:10

But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.

Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

Materials Needed:

Large, tan felt circle underlay
Dark blue felt circle underlay
City of Nineveh
People: Jonah, Captain, Sailors, King, People of Nineveh
Boat with Sail
Cargo
Waves
Big Fish

Small Basket for People
Small Basket for Cargo and Scroll
Large Basket to hold the story