

Psalms of Hope



Psalms workshop KS1

THE CHURCH
SCHOOLS OF
CAMBRIDGE

Introduction

Today we are going to be thinking about psalms.
Can anyone tell me what they think a psalm is?
Can you tell me where you might find a psalm?
Has anyone ever read or heard a psalm?

Story

You will need: praying hands, harp and King David figure, musical instrument, chain, chain, praying figure, pen and parchment, wooden heart, labels on sticks (Where are you God?; I have a problem; Please help; God is great!), heart, rock, cave, rope and wave, arrow, flame, musical instrument and crown, shepherd, sheep, seeds, tree, sword, bowl, eagle.

Place the praying hands in the back centre

The Book of Psalms in the Bible is the prayer book of God's People. In it we find poems and songs which have been prayed by the Jewish people for over three thousand years, and then Christians have joined in.

Place harp and King figure on either side

Some of the oldest psalms are said to be songs written by King David.

There are different types of psalms in the bible – each one takes you on a different kind of journey.

Place musical instrument,

There are psalms praising and thanking God for good things,

Rattle and place chain then place praying figure beside it to the left

And here are the psalms of lament -crying out to God when everything seems to be going wrong and hoping for better times.

Pretend to write with a pen

A psalm is a bit like a letter to God – saying different things in different parts.

Draw wiggly line in sand, and place heart at end

Once you know the different parts, they take you on a journey – getting closer to God, and deeper into the heart of what God wants for the world.

Draw 3 lines in the sand

In a psalm, there are often four different sections:

Place labels on sticks in a row across the centre; one in each section

The psalm by calling out to God to listen – the 'Dear God' bit at the beginning – **'Where are you God?'**

Then comes the bit telling God **'I have a problem'**– telling God what has happened since you last wrote – catching God up with your news.

Next comes the part asking God to do something about the problem – ‘**Pease help.**’

Finally, there is the praise part – where you tell God that you know God has heard you, and you promise to praise God, because you trust God to help you and sort things out. ‘**God is great!**’ It’s like when you say ‘best wishes’, or ‘lots of love’ at the end of a letter.

Let’s look at a psalm to see how it works.

Psalms 18 is a psalm of King David, about a time when he was being attacked by his enemies.

Place the objects behind the relevant labels:

Place heart then rock and cave

It opens calling out to God:

**I love you Lord;
You are my rock and my shelter.**

Place rope and wave

Then telling God what the problem is:

**The ropes of death have tangled me up;
Floods of destruction sweep over me.**

Place arrow then flame

Then comes the part asking God for help:

**Lord, shoot down your arrows to scatter my enemies;
Let your lightening flash so they get confused!**

Place musical instrument then crown

And finally, the part **praising** God:

**O Lord, I will sing praises to your name;
You give great victories to your king.**

Place key towards the front

A psalm is a bit like a beautiful doorway – you can appreciate it from the outside, but if you have the key to unlock the door, you can see even more once you get inside.

Psalms use a special kind of poetry. Understanding how the poetry works, it helps people of faith come close to God.

Psalms use a kind of **picture language**. It isn’t easy to talk to God just using words, so they use images or symbols to dig deep into the meaning.

Psalms 18 uses pictures of a God as a rock and shelter, and enemies as ropes of death, and floods of destruction, and God’s power as arrows and lightening.

Place tree, seeds, wheat, shepherd, sheep, sword, bowl, eagle, lion – along the front

The psalms use words to paint pictures of things from everyday life that people in Bible times would have known and seen around them:

trees and fruit, sowing seeds and harvesting the crops, shepherds and sheep, weapons, cooking pots, eagles, lions and so many more!

Move your hand in the air across the story bag

Psalms take us on a journey – they help us to look at our lives and get them on the right path.

Wondering

I wonder what is your favourite part of this story?

I wonder what is the most important part?

You are going to be writing a psalm:
telling God about a problem, and hoping it will be sorted out.

I wonder what sort of problem you might like to write about?

What is going on in the world today that needs fixing?

I wonder what picture words you might choose to use in your psalm?

When you have written your psalm, you are going to copy out in your best writing, and then decorate it.

I am going to show some pictures of some psalms

PowerPoint

Slide 1 - titles

Slide 2

But first, this is the Great Psalms Scroll - the oldest surviving copy of the psalms. It is written in Hebrew on animal skins; and stored rolled up as a scroll.

The Jewish people didn't paint pictures of God, or even anything God has created. The beautiful handwriting, the calligraphy, is enough to show it is holy scripture.

Slide 3

Christians liked to add decorations. By the Middle Ages, they were getting more and more elaborate. Some of the monasteries in our area made beautifully copies of the Book of Psalms.

This is page from the Ormesby Psalter, which was made in Norfolk at the end of the thirteenth century – about seven hundred years ago. The writing has been framed by decorations and pictures. Can you see the man riding the goat and the people with the dog at the bottom?

Slide 4

This is a close-up of the page we have just seen. Can you see the angels and the strange bird on the left-hand side?

Slide 5

Here is another page from the Ormesby Psalter- with a knight in shining armour, and a man creeping up on him. It shows how King David felt when he was being attacked by his enemies.

Slide 6

This is a page from the Macclesfield Psalter, which was made in East Anglia at the beginning of the fourteenth century. It is now kept in the Fitzwilliam Museum, in Cambridge and sometimes they have it on show so you can go to see it.

Slide 7

This is a close-up of the page you have just seen. The middle of the capital letter 'O' at the beginning of the psalm has got a picture inside.

Slide 8

Here is another page which has a bit of a joke on – a man is being chased by a huge fish. Can you see the gold leaf?

Slide 9

This is a page from the Luttrell Psalter, which was made in in the middle of the fourteenth century. It is part of Psalm 26. King David talks about going to God's altar in God's house – can you see the priest standing behind the altar in church at the bottom of the page?

Slide 10

Here is a detail of the page you have just seen. Can you see all the little birds down the side?

Slide 11

This is another page from the Luttrell Psalter. The psalms talk a lot about sowing and harvesting, and artist shows what harvesting was like seven hundred years ago – here they are threshing the corn. We use machines nowadays!

Slide 12

Here are two people playing with a hammock. It's something we might do in our gardens.

Slide 13

This is the whole page. Can you see the fantastic beast down the side?

Slide 14

The cat has just caught a mouse.

Slide 15

Here are two people playing a board game.

Slide 16

Can you see the watermill at the bottom of this page? It is Psalm 103, which talks about God's love overflowing, just like the water is flowing over the mill wheel.

Slide 17

The Luttrell Psalter was made for Sir Geoffrey Luttrell.

Sometimes artists added in portraits of the people they were making the book for - can you see Sir Geoffrey in the middle of the table?

I wonder how you will choose to decorate your psalm?

When you are writing your psalm remember:

- Start by thinking of the problem you want to be solved
- Think of your psalm as a journey. Where are you starting, and where will you end up?
- Write something for each of the sections
- Choose some picture words and symbols from your life to help you explain what you mean
- Then use some of the images from the words you have chosen to decorate your psalm

Follow-up Activity – Listening to the Psalms

The psalms were designed to be chanted or sung. They have been a source of musical creativity for thousands of years.

Here are some psalms for you to listen to:

Traditional Hebrew psalms using ancient tunes – Psalm 127:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Filrbg101jk>

Modern Jewish psalms in English – Debbie Friedman, Psalm 126:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7L44yZkbGjc&list=PL2a89NGcTeeqaZaMKW34rjaO0DxinnLG_&index=6

Cathedral choir singing in plainsong in Latin, in a tradition that continues from days of the early Christian church – Westminster Cathedral choir - Psalm 116:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2v3aurq29ys>

Renaissance polyphony – William Byrd 'Sing joyfully' - Psalm 81:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=va55VwsSX8U>

Victorian anthems – Mendelssohn 'Lift thine eyes' – Psalm 121:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xc-BFtqkMQY>

Taize chants – ‘Bless the Lord my Soul’ – Psalm 103:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4>

Modern worship song – Jason Silver, ‘Praise the name of the Lord’ – Psalm 113:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3AYH8Yqk1w>

Celtic-style folk psalm – Kiran Young Wimberley, ‘You have turned my sorrow to dancing and joy’ - Psalm 30: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5mjrZXd-w0

I wonder which you like best?