

Designing an Australian Quaker Children's Program
A Share and Tell presentation by the Children and JYF co-ordinators at
Australia Yearly Meeting 2020

Wednesday, 8 July

This Share and Tell session was created to invite collaboration on the creation of a child-centred, Quaker-led children's program. This has been a concern of Tania's for the past couple of years. Following recent discussions between the co-coordinators, Gina has agreed to work collaboratively on the program over the coming twelve months. This Share and Tell was presented at Yearly Meeting 2020 in order to gather ideas and suggestions for the structure and content of the program. We also hoped that participants might be interested in working collaboratively with us on the program.

Learning more about Regional Children's Meetings

Mardi Naulty, our technical support person from Canberra Regional Meeting, introduced the session and acknowledged that we were meeting on a variety of First Nations lands around Australia.

Tania asked participants to describe their Meetings' Children's Meetings. These ranged from no children attending to "a handful" of attendees, to up to nine children attending Meeting. Participants noted that at times, "energy is low" in their Children's Meeting and that at times, activities can seem a little ad hoc.

Themes, Stories and Activities

Fittingly, Ryan McLaren, aged almost 11, took over technical support to match participants to their desired breakout session. Gina took notes about suggested **themes** for Children's Meeting. Tania met with participants to discuss **books** and **stories** that could be used in Children's Meeting. A third group discussed **games** and **activity ideas**, but unfortunately, as we had already been beset by a variety of technical difficulties in the first twenty minutes of the session, Tania forgot to request notes from this third group, so we have no record of their suggestions.

Themes:

Themes that participants nominated for inclusion in the program:

- The Quaker Testimonies of peace, love (as a verb or intention, rather than an emotion), earthcare, and the SPICES
- Quaker history (especially as a means of understanding the Testimonies, how they originated, and how they have been lived out and continue to be lived out by others) - local, eg, from Tasmania, and worldwide
- Quaker organisations such as the Quaker United Nations Office and Friends World Committee for Consultation

- Environmental education
- The Virtue Continuum
- Inspiring people from the present day (people who are “walking the talk” of Quaker Testimonies)

Books and Stories:

Discussion about books and stories for inclusion in the Children’s program yielded general principles and guidelines rather than a list of specific texts:

- The stories and experiences of individual children and young people should be treated as valuable and could be just as important as written texts
- Quality picture books could work at several different levels for children of different ages.
- Children can read the story of the day, too and should be invited to participate if they feel comfortable to do so.
- Sometimes in place of a story, children could respond to a question - either taken from, or modified from, a Quaker text.
- Sacred stories are important, and all four participants in this breakout group agreed that the Faith and Play story told by Melinda Wenner-Bradley the previous day at All-Ages Meeting for Worship offered an inspiring model for storytelling.
- Tania asked how the participants felt about the inclusion of digital stories - for example, picture books read on a YouTube clip. The other participants expressed a sense that these are a “backup option” and that personal interaction through having a child or adult read or tell a story is preferable.
- Back in the main session, Ali from VRM noted that during a virtual meeting, we need not be reliant on a previously-created online clip to use a story - Liz Shield has successfully scanned a story and created a PDF to share over Zoom, and her daughter Clancy was then able to read the story aloud while Liz “turned the pages.”

At the end of the Share and Tell, Ali Freeman, Maree-rose Jones and Geoff Greeves all offered to read program drafts and provide feedback to Gina and Tania.

We appreciate the advice, support and interest of those who attended the Share and Tell. We are grateful to Mardi Naulty for offering technical support, and Ryan Maclaren, who will surely be running sessions at the IT Helpdesk at Yearly Meeting 2021, whether it is a face-to-face or virtual meeting!