



 NCCL
Accompaniment
in Faith

PRACTICES + SKILLS FOR CATECHISTS & EDUCATORS

Video Guide

Creative Learning Methods & Activities: Inquiring-Based Learning

Mariette Martineau

National Community of Catechetical Leaders

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Inquiry-Based Learning

Ideas from the Video Presentation

1. Leading an Inquiry Activity

Imagine you have just arrived at a learning session and after greeting you the catechist puts a small portion of what might be either salt or sugar on your open palm.

The catechist then invites you to ponder a collection of questions:

- Can you recognize what is on your hand just by looking at it?
- Could you recognize it by taste? Would you take a big or small taste?
- Ok let me tell you that it is safe to taste, go ahead, taste it.
- So, you now know it is salt, what are the properties of salt? What do we do with it? What do we know about it?
- How did Jesus teach using salt, what scripture do you know contains connections to salt?

The catechist would share a few scripture connections to salt, then ask:

- What teachings does salt have to offer us about sharing God's word with others?

Ordinary item is now an everyday reminder about sharing God's word...

2. Teaching with Objects

I wonder sometimes if Jesus would have made an excellent science teacher, as he used so many concrete objects to make his teachings clearer. He seemed to have a good understanding of the properties of the created world.

Jesus taught with rocks, water, dirt, light, mustard seeds, fig trees...he took what was right in front of him and engaged the learner.

The process for designing learning around objects, or artifacts as the educator world calls them, is a relatively simple one: observe → wonder → connect → claim meaning.

Step 1: Observe. Present the learners with the artifact linked to the learning focus.

Step 2: Wonder. Invite learners to name everything they notice about the object – that is called naming the properties of the object. Using sight, touch, smell - the item is explored and described.

Step 3: Connect. The catechetical learning goals of the session are then brought forward and learners are encouraged to make connections between the object and the goals of the lesson. For example, if a rock is used to explore why Jesus told Peter to be the rock of his church, what are the properties of rocks that Jesus was referring to? Why would he call Peter a rock?

Step 4: Claim the Meaning. The learning wraps up with the challenge: how are we called to be rocks like Peter? What is our job to support and live Jesus' mission?

3. Confirming the Importance of Inquiry-Based Learning

It levels the playing field. An object asks nothing of prior knowledge. Every child in the room can observe, notice, and wonder — regardless of reading level, background, or attention span. Inquiry starts from what everyone can see.

It puts the learner in the role of discoverer. Rather than receiving information, the child is doing the work of noticing, questioning, and interpreting. That shift in role changes everything about how learning feels and sticks.

It activates all the senses. When learners touch, examine, and describe something physical, more of the brain is engaged than when they simply listen. Multisensory engagement deepens memory and retention.

It anchors learning in the concrete. Children (and most adults) think from the particular to the general — from this to meaning. An object gives the mind something real to hold onto before abstractions are introduced. You earn the idea because you discovered it.

In a catechetical context specifically, objects carry an added layer — a candle, a cross, water, oil, bread — these aren't just interesting artifacts. They are saturated with meaning. Beginning with the object lets children encounter the sacred before being told what to think about it, which makes the explanation land far more deeply

“Long before it had a name, inquiry-based learning had a teacher — one who held up a mustard seed, asked ‘who do you say that I am,’ and changed the world.”

Inquiry-Based Learning – Activity Examples

Inquiry-Based Learning Activities for Children

Inquiry-based learning starts with a genuine question and invites children to investigate a Bible story directly — noticing, wondering, and discovering — rather than simply being told what it means. These activities use concrete, sensory, and hands-on approaches suited to younger learners.

1. Why Did Noah Need Two of Every Animal?

Topic: Noah's Ark and God's care for creation (Genesis 6–9)

Driving Question

“Why did God want Noah to save two of every kind of animal — not just people?”

Investigate

Read or tell the story of Noah's Ark. Give small groups animal picture cards and ask them to sort the animals into pairs, then act out or draw how they think the animals might have fit and lived on the ark.

- What do you notice about which animals God chose to save?
- What do you think it means that God cared about the animals too, not just Noah's family?

Construct Understanding

As a group, create a simple picture chart or mural of the ark showing the animals in pairs, with a sentence or two the group agrees on: “God saved the animals because...”

Share and Reflect

Groups share their charts. Close with: “What is something in nature — an animal, a plant, the earth — that you think God wants us to take care of today?”

2. Why Was Little Zacchaeus So Excited to See Jesus?

Topic: Zacchaeus climbs the tree (Luke 19:1–10)

Driving Question

“Why did Zacchaeus climb all the way up a tree just to see Jesus?”

Investigate

Read the story of Zacchaeus aloud, pausing partway through (right before Jesus looks up into the tree) and ask children to predict what happens next. Then finish the story.

- What do you notice about how the crowd treated Zacchaeus?
- What do you notice about how Jesus treated Zacchaeus instead?
- Why do you think Zacchaeus was so happy Jesus wanted to visit his house?

Construct Understanding

Have children act out the story in small groups (someone playing the tree, Zacchaeus, the crowd, and Jesus), then discuss as a group: “What does this story teach us about how Jesus treats people others might ignore?”

Share and Reflect

Gather as a class and ask: “Has anyone ever felt left out like Zacchaeus? How did it feel when someone noticed you anyway?”

3. Why Did the Shepherd Leave 99 Sheep to Find Just One?

Topic: The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1–7)

Driving Question

“If a shepherd already had 99 sheep, why would he go looking for just one that got lost?”

Investigate

Hide 10 small sheep cutouts (or cotton balls) around the room ahead of time, but tell children there should be 10 and only let them find 9 easily. Ask: “Should we keep looking for the last one, or is 9 good enough?” Let them discuss, then read the parable together.

- What do you notice about how hard the shepherd looked for the one lost sheep?
- What do you think the shepherd felt when he found it?

Construct Understanding

As a group, draw or act out the moment the shepherd finds the lost sheep. Discuss together: “Jesus told this story to explain how God feels about us. What do you think God is like, based on this story?”

Share and Reflect

Close with a simple question for personal reflection: “Have you ever felt ‘lost’ — confused, alone, or far from God? What does it mean that God comes looking for you?”

Why Inquiry-Based Bible Study Works Well for Children

Children learn best through noticing, wondering, and hands-on discovery rather than being told the “meaning” of a story upfront. Starting with a real question — and letting kids predict, act out, and explore before explaining — builds genuine curiosity about Scripture and helps the story’s meaning feel discovered rather than delivered. It also gives even young children practice noticing details in a text, a skill that will serve their faith and their reading for years to come.

Inquiry-Based Learning Activities for Adolescents

Inquiry-based learning starts with a genuine question and invites learners to investigate Scripture directly, gather evidence, and construct their own understanding — with the catechist guiding rather than delivering conclusions. These activities focus on close reading and comparison of Biblical texts.

1. Why Are There Four Gospels Instead of One?

Topic: The Gospels as distinct theological portraits of Jesus

Driving Question

“If all four Gospels are about Jesus, why don't they tell the story the same way?”

Investigate

In small groups, teens compare the same event across multiple Gospels — for example, the Resurrection accounts:

- Matthew 28:1–10
- Mark 16:1–8
- Luke 24:1–12
- John 20:1–18

Groups chart: Who is present? What details are included or left out? What tone or emphasis does each Gospel writer seem to have?

Construct Understanding

Groups draft a short explanation of why these differences exist — considering audience, purpose, and each evangelist's theological focus — rather than assuming the differences are contradictions or mistakes.

Share and Reflect

Groups present their findings. Close with: “Does it strengthen or challenge your faith to know the Gospels aren't identical accounts? Why?”

2. What Kind of King Did People Expect — and What Kind of King Was Jesus?

Topic: Messianic expectation and Jesus's redefinition of kingship

Driving Question

“Why did some people who wanted a Messiah still reject Jesus?”

Investigate

Teens examine a set of passages in small groups:

- Old Testament messianic expectation (e.g., Isaiah 9:6–7, a king who reigns in power)
- The Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:1–11) — crowds expecting a political liberator
- Jesus before Pilate (John 18:33–37) — “My kingdom is not of this world”
- The Crucifixion inscription “King of the Jews” (John 19:19–22)

Groups identify: What kind of king/Messiah did people expect? How does Jesus's actual kingship differ? Why might that gap have led to rejection?

Construct Understanding

Groups create a simple two-column comparison: "Expected Messiah" vs. "Jesus's Actual Kingship" using textual evidence for each column.

Share and Reflect

Groups present their comparisons. Close with: "Are there ways you want Jesus to be a different kind of King than He actually is? What would you need to let go of?"

3. Why Does Jesus Keep Telling People Not to Tell Anyone?

Topic: The Messianic Secret in Mark's Gospel

Driving Question

"If Jesus wanted people to believe in Him, why does He keep telling people to keep His identity and miracles secret?"

Investigate

In small groups, teens read and track a pattern across Mark's Gospel:

- Mark 1:40–45 (healing a leper, then "sternly warned him" to say nothing)
- Mark 5:35–43 (raising Jairus's daughter, "strictly ordered that no one should know")
- Mark 8:27–30 (Peter's confession — "He warned them not to tell anyone about him")
- Mark 9:2–9 (the Transfiguration — "tell no one... until the Son of Man had risen from the dead")

Groups track: In each passage, who is told to be silent, and about what? Does the instruction ever include a reason or timeframe? What do people do anyway?

Construct Understanding

Groups draft a short explanation for the pattern — considering that premature or incomplete understanding of Jesus as a political or miracle-working Messiah (without the Cross) could distort who He actually is. Groups note: the "secret" consistently lifts after the Resurrection — why might that timing matter?

Share and Reflect

Groups present their explanations. Close with: "Is there a version of Jesus you're tempted to believe in that skips the Cross — one that's only about power, comfort, or miracles? What would it mean to wait for the fuller picture, like Jesus asked His disciples to?"

Why Inquiry-Based Scripture Study Works Well for Adolescents

Teens are old enough to notice apparent tensions and inconsistencies in the Biblical text — and if those tensions go unaddressed, they can quietly erode trust in Scripture's reliability. Inquiry-based study meets that head-on: instead of smoothing over difficulty, it invites teens to do the close reading themselves, discover that apparent contradictions often resolve with context and care, and walk away with a Bible they've actually wrestled with rather than one simply handed to them.