

The teachFASTly.com resources are not intended as a complete curriculum. The activities are designed to be woven into your existing teaching. This Quick Stop Lesson Plan is therefore not a single lesson plan, but rather a quick way of exploring the themes of an Activity Map. It includes one Discover activity, one Delve activity, and one Debrief activity. Together, these may take more than a class period, and you may want to add other activities between them. For more information, visit www.teachfastly.com.

Wonder and Wisdom

When you think of the role of the Bible in conversations about faith and science, do you find yourself thinking of only a few key passages? Discussions about how to read Genesis have tended to loom large in faith and science debates, to the degree that students might be left with the impression that the Bible's contribution to the conversation is limited to those few chapters.

This Activity Map offers a selection of activities. These are intended for Bible class, but some could be used in a science class, if desired. The activities approach the Bible's relationship to science from less familiar angles, ones grounded in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, focused on themes of wonder and wisdom in relation to the natural world.

This map helps students see the relationship between the Bible and science as rich and intriguing, and not as contending a few key issues. It tries to engage them in thinking carefully about what a wider range of Bible passages might have to do with how we think about the natural world.

This Quick Stop Lesson Plan on **Wonder and Wisdom** contains the following activities and attachments from www.teachfastly.com, which are combined for your ease of use in a downloadable ZIP file:

DISCOVER Activity: Walk of Wonder

Activity Attachment

- *Walk of Wonder Handout*

DELVE Activity: Where is Wisdom

Activity Attachments

- *Where is Wisdom Handout*
- *Where is Wisdom Slideshow*

DEBRIEF Activity: Write a Psalm

Activity Attachment

- *Write a Psalm Handout*

DISCOVER

Activity: Walk of Wonder

Time: Extended

In Brief

This activity introduces the idea that there are connections linking careful observation of the natural world, science learning, and the biblical call to wisdom and worship. It engages students in exploring their immediate environment with a family member or other adult. Students will go on a walk with an adult partner, make observations, and record these to share with the class.

Goals

Students will understand that attentiveness to the natural world can be connected to both faith and science.

Students will consider the relationship between biblical texts about creation and wisdom, and their own relationship to the natural world around them.

Thinking Ahead

This activity is about making connections and asking how things that may appear separate are related:

- Is science related to what we see in our own neighborhood?
- Is paying attention to our surroundings related to biblical wisdom and worship?
- Is science related to wisdom and worship?
- Is school homework tied exclusively to books and online research, or can it draw on relationships and the world around us?

The goal here is not to provide definitive answers, but to begin a process of reflection that can be deepened in subsequent activities (such as Activity: Where Is Wisdom [see below], which pairs well with this opener).

Consider how often your regular teaching practices help students make connections between different aspects of their learning and experience.

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- Bibles or copies of the **Walk of Wonder Handout**

Teaching the Activity

For homework, assign students to recruit a parent or another adult to go on a neighborhood walk with them. The walk should not be long, and the pair should remain close to home. Students should explain to their adult activity partner that the goal is for each of them to notice

something interesting or beautiful in the surrounding environment that they had not noticed before, or that they might not have paid attention to normally. This could be an animal, bird, or insect, some variety of plant in a yard or cracked sidewalk. It could have something to do with light or water, a sound, or a smell.

Each should find something to notice, and share this with the other. Together, they should pause for a closer look, and try to observe it as carefully as possible.

After the walk, students should record what they each saw, and their observations. In particular, they should focus on what they noticed as they stopped and observed more carefully. For each of the two things noticed, students should research online and find one piece of scientific information about it that they did not know before, and record this.

In class, have students work in groups of three to share their reports. Then have them read together Psalm 8 and Proverbs 8:22-31 (from Bibles or from the **Walk of Wonder Handout**). When they have had a chance to read the passages, discuss with students:

- What might these Bible passages have to do with your walk?
- What does paying close attention to the natural world have to do with God, according to the passages you read?
- Is that connection only relevant to your initial response of curiosity, or could engaging in more detailed scientific inquiry also be part of a worshipful response to the natural world?

Finally, explain to students that in subsequent activities, they are going to explore how the Bible connects wisdom with taking delight in creation. Mention that the acts of slowing down, observing carefully, and investigating further are integral to science, but that they are also connected to faith. Tell students that they will be thinking more about how science and biblical wisdom might be related.

DELVE

Activity: Where Is Wisdom

Time: 30 Minutes

In Brief

This activity engages students in comparing current cultural images of wise people with the concept of wisdom presented in Proverbs 8. It also invites them to see how the understanding of wisdom in Proverbs 8 might connect to possible motivations for learning and practicing natural science.

Goals

Students will explore the concept of wisdom and how it differs in the biblical wisdom literature and popular imagery, which often equates it to solitary withdrawal from the world.

Students will understand that delight in the natural world can be connected to both biblical wisdom and to natural science.

Thinking Ahead

In popular cartoons, the wise person is frequently pictured sitting alone atop an inaccessible mountain, separated from normal human tasks and relationships and thinking deep thoughts. Seeking wisdom seems a lonely and solemn affair. The biblical wisdom literature situates wisdom in the midst of human affairs, and ties it to joy as well as to holiness.

As you prepare for this activity, consider your own unconscious assumptions:

- Do you picture wisdom in a way that connects it to taking joy in creation?
- Do you see scientific fascination with the natural world as overlapping with the joy in creation called for in Proverbs?
- How do the practices of your classroom model wisdom?

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- Copies of **Where Is Wisdom Handout**
- Presentation slides in **Where Is Wisdom**

Teaching the Activity

Display the first slide of the **Where Is Wisdom Slideshow**, which shows the word “wisdom” and the phrase “A wise person...”

If students have internet access, have them conduct an image search for “wise man,” “wise woman,” and “wise person,” and look for commonalities in the kinds of images that appear. If students do not have internet access, you could show your own search results on the screen

and look for commonalities. Discuss what these images suggest about how our culture views wisdom. Focus on the following questions:

- Are the people mostly old or young?
- Are they mostly alone or in interaction with others?
- Are they down-to-earth and practical, or mystical and otherworldly?
- Are they solemn or joyful?

You could explore what happens if the search is limited to clipart:

- Why are wise people in cartoons so often sitting atop mountains alone, outside of all everyday tasks and relationships?
- What picture of wisdom does that suggest?

Ask students to discuss in pairs how they might complete the phrase “A wise person...”

- What do they think of as the key characteristics of wisdom?
- What does a wise person do, or what qualities do they possess?

Ask pairs to share their examples, and discuss any commonalities in the class's picture of what is involved in wisdom.

Next, hand out copies of the **Where Is Wisdom Handout** and display the text of Proverbs 8 using Slides 2 through 5 of the **Where Is Wisdom Slideshow**. Each slide has a section of a text, and shows three oppositions based on the above questions (Practical/Mystical, Alone/Relationships, Solemn/Joyful).

As you display each slide:

- Read the section of text aloud.
- Pause and ask students to read it over again silently.
- Ask a student to read it aloud a second time.
- Ask students to make a few notes on any details in the passage that describe wisdom as more a practical or a mystical matter, more about lonely meditation or life with others, and more solemn or more joyful.

Once this is complete for all four sections of text, discuss the picture that has emerged. How does it differ from the images found in the initial search? Make sure students notice the connections of wisdom to the city gates (a public place for meetings and transactions), government, justice, the natural world, and pleasure in the company of others.

Next, focus on verses 30 and 31, and ask students to identify what wisdom, here personified, enjoys. These verses present wisdom as taking delight in God, in the natural world, and in other people. Ask students to consider why each of these would be wise—why might it be wise to enjoy God, to enjoy the natural world, and to enjoy other people?

Show Slide 6, which presents a quotation from Walter Brueggemann about the biblical wisdom literature. Explain that Brueggemann is a prominent Old Testament theologian, and that he is describing here the characteristics of wisdom books such as Job and Proverbs. While the books of the law state the boundaries of the covenant revealed by God, and while the prophets speak out with a “thus says the LORD,” the wisdom literature invites us to go and observe ants or to consider the fate of the lazy.

Give students time to read the quotation and ask them how it connects to the Proverbs 8 passage.

Finally, remind students that they have been exploring (through other activities in this map) unexpected points of connection between the Bible and science.

Ask what the Brueggemann quotation might suggest about the relationship between wisdom and science.

Present Slide 7, which shows a quotation from the book *God in the Lab* by Ruth Bancewicz. Explain that Dr. Bancewicz is a scientist who writes about science and religion, and that here she is describing the start of her doctoral studies.

Ask students how this passage relates to Proverbs 8:

- What is wise about this response to zebra fish?
- Surely, being excited about zebra fish is not the whole of wisdom, which also includes things such as virtue and the ability to make good choices, but could it be a part of wisdom, or a response that reflects wisdom in some way?
- Can natural science, with its more disciplined forms of observation, be approached in a way that makes it a part of becoming wise?
- Can combining scientific investigation with a sense of wonder and gratitude be a part of becoming wise?

Conclude by asking students to write a reflective journal entry considering the following two questions:

1. How is the picture of wisdom in Proverbs 8 similar to or different from your ideas about wisdom at the start of this class?
2. In Proverbs 8, wisdom includes finding delight in God, in the natural world, and in other people. Can you identify times in your past week that reflected wisdom or lack of wisdom? How could you respond to the call in Proverbs 8 to “not neglect” wisdom?

DEBRIEF

Activity: Write a Psalm

Time: 35 Minutes

In Brief

This activity engages students in composing a Psalm in light of what they have been learning about the relationship of biblical and scientific language. It offers an opportunity for personal response to what has been learned, and space for prayer and worship.

Goals

Students will engage in close reading of extracts from several Psalms, and respond personally in the form of their own Psalm composition.

Thinking Ahead

This activity allows space for more personal responses to some of the themes explored in this map. You will need to consider the range of beliefs and experience of your students, and whether it is appropriate to invite prayer and worship as part of students' response, or whether associating this with homework could be coercive for some students. Make clear to students that a variety of forms of personal engagement are appropriate. Be sensitive to whether or not students would like their work to be displayed or shared further.

Preparing the Activity

Needed:

- Copies of the **Write a Psalm Handout**

Teaching the Activity

This activity allows students to author a personal response to their reflections on wisdom and wonder, to consider the genre of Psalms in the Bible, and to think about the relationship of biblical and scientific language.

Begin by briefly reviewing what has been learned from previous activities about the relationships between biblical wisdom and scientific attention to the natural world. Then distribute copies of the **Write a Psalm Handout**, which includes the instructions below, as well as extracts from several Psalms that focus in some way on the natural world. (If you wish, you could also show students an example of a modern Psalm, such as <http://psalmsoflife.com/psalm66.htm> written by John Hammersley.)

A. Read and reflect:

1. Read the Psalm extracts below, and think about what their main themes are. What do they express about God? How do they view the created world?
2. Look at how the Psalms are structured. Look for repetition of words, phrases or sentence patterns. Look for how the ideas develop through the Psalm.

3. Consider the length of each passage. How might its effect be different if it were twice as long? Or half as long? (Check the context in the Bible to see how long the original Psalm was.)

Write a short paragraph summarizing what you noticed about these Psalms.

B. Engage:

1. Think about what parts of the created world (nature and the world of human relationships, for both are seen as part of creation in the Bible) most interest or impress you. Think also about aspects of the world that grieve you. Make a list.
2. Look back at the items on the list. What is it that intrigues or impresses you about each one? Is it particularly intricate, for instance, or powerful, or beautiful, or challenging? Make a note next to each item about what draws your attention to it.
3. Consider how each item on the list might suggest or call out to some facet of God's character—wisdom, power, mystery, care, or something else.

Write a short paragraph summarizing your ideas.

C. Write and respond:

1. Using the Psalms that you read as a loose model, write your own Psalm based on your notes and your own list of items.
2. Consider what kind of language to use. If the Psalm is to be a prayer, should its words be simple and direct or detailed and descriptive? Is there a place in the Psalm for both poetic and scientific language for describing things? Why/why not? How can the language of your Psalm reflect our present world and what we know about it?
3. Consider how to use your Psalm as a personal response to what you have been learning. You may wish to pray your psalm, read it aloud together with a family member, share it with someone else, or add visual elements.

Add your Psalm to your earlier paragraphs, and close with a brief comment on what you think makes your Psalm similar to, or different from, the biblical Psalms.