

Beloved Me, Beloved We **Godly Play** Equity Audit Toolkit

introduction

Examining our Godly Play practice for Implicit Bias

In the winter of 2021, the Godly Play Foundation convened a group of 17 people to participate in a 5-month process of exploring our organizational culture, training, and curriculum and materials through an anti-racism lens. The [Beloved Me, Beloved We Initiative](#) came out of that task force.

Beloved Me, Beloved We Initiative Vision:

To delightfully and prophetically inspire brave spaces so that every child who comes close to Godly Play, encounters a felt sense of their inherent worth and dignity as one uniquely and fully created in God's image (Beloved Me) and co-creates a way of being and inspiring inclusive communities which celebrate the diversity of God and God's creation (Beloved We).

Equity Audit:

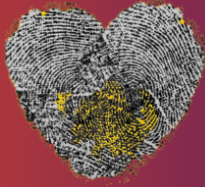
One of the priorities of this initiative is to audit our storytelling curricula and materials to identify what terms, phrases, art, and materials “bump” people from different perspectives out of the circle. The goal is to update the language and materials in all our 90 stories so that everyone can feel their belonging and worth in a Godly Play classroom. We commit to highlighting and increasing access to those updated lessons and materials.

In the spring of 2021, the Foundation, in partnership with the Diocese of Massachusetts, was awarded a Becoming Beloved Community Grant from the Episcopal Church to begin this work. We convened a team of eight people to lead an audit of several of our stories as a beginning point to start this work.

This toolkit is designed for practitioners to offer:

1. Adjustments to language in stories
2. Ideas for increasing the diversity of representation in your classroom
3. Ideas for adjustments to make to materials

The process of auditing our materials was intensive and included storytelling, wondering, and response time for each story. For this first iteration, we were able to explore 10 stories. Because this is significant and intentional work, we know it will take some time before we can do this for all 90 stories. While we continue to add specific language and material changes for each story, we invite you to make general adjustments to the stories. We offer suggestions below for how you might adjust the stories you tell.



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Questions to Ponder about Language

Does the story use racially inclusive language?

For example, we changed the language from “slave” and “master” to “enslaved” and “enslaver”. Visit the [Underground Railroad History Center](#) for more information about why this language matters.

Is the language gender inclusive?

For example, change “sons and daughters” to “children” or “men and women” to “people”.

Is the language inclusive of children from various socioeconomic backgrounds?

In some stories, we mention vacations, big gifts, or purchasing new clothes in a way that implies all children have that experience. More inclusion recognizes that not all children go on vacations or get new clothes at the beginning of the school year.

Does the language reinforce the idea that whiteness is ideal?

We encourage being mindful of any places where “white” is used to reinforce a cultural narrative that white is the ideal. For example, instead of saying, “white is THE color of celebration,” you might say, “white is a color of celebration.” You might invite the children to wonder more about color, by asking, “I wonder what color reminds you of celebration...”

Does the language suggest in any way that blackness is bad, empty, or scary?

Ensure the language reflects the idea that light and dark are equally good, and that darkness is not empty but full of possibility. To expand your language for darkness in scripture, we recommend the picture book *God’s Holy Darkness* by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick.

Does the language frame “pure” as an ideal?

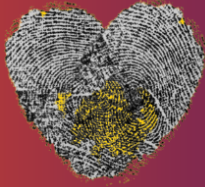
We suggest taking out the term “pure” in the stories. In general, it is used as an adjective that can be taken out without the need to replace it with another term.

Does the story adequately reflect the cultural, social, and political dynamics of the time?

For instance, in the Creation story, we talk about the sun and moon as lights which rule the day and night. We suggest replacing the word *rule*, which might have imperialistic overtones, with *guide*.

Is the language inclusive of how people move and experience the world?

For example, in the Creation story, we changed the language from “When God saw the creatures that walk with two legs and the creatures that walk with many legs...” to “When God saw all the creatures that live on the earth...” Be mindful of language, such as walking, hearing, and seeing. If the language is used to describe something that happened in the story, like “they walked to...” then we suggest you leave that. However, if the language is used to describe a body of people experiencing something (seeing, hearing, walking), consider other or multiple ways to describe the experience.



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Questions to Ponder about Materials:

Are a variety of body types, skin colors, genders, and ages represented in the materials?

For example, in some of our materials, only adult men are represented, whereas other genders and ages of people would have likely been there. Consider adding materials to your shelves through picture books and art, which show the diversity of God's creation.

Does your Godly Play environment reflect the beauty and diversity of God's creation?

In 2021 we commissioned new art for the Faces of Easter story so that Jesus and the other important characters in the story are black. We will continue to commission new art for other stories, including *The Greatest Parable* and *Knowing Jesus in a New Way*, to represent the diversity of God's creation. While it is not possible to reflect such vast diversity within each story, we encourage you to work to build an environment where children are immersed in the diversity and beauty of creation from all perspectives—body types, skin color, ways of moving and seeing (wheelchairs, glasses, etc.), hair types and styles, clothing choices, ages, sizes, and more. You can do that in various ways by looking at the art on the walls, the books on the shelves, the types of response materials you offer, and the story materials.

Tools and ideas to help as you explore how to build that diverse and beautiful environment:

- [Art in Christian Tradition database](#): Designed for scholars, students, pastors, and religious educators, all of the images may be used for non-commercial purposes, with attribution. There are currently 7154 images in the collection.
- Consider networking with local Godly Play practitioners or join the discussion on the [Knowing Godly Play in a New Way](#) Facebook group to share resources and ideas.
- Deepen your shelves with picture books that feature diversity such as
 - Nana Akua Goes to School by Tricia Elam Walker
 - First Light, First Life by Paul Fleischman
 - Rain Before Rainbows by Smriti Prasad-Halls
 - Many Shapes of Clay by Kenesha Sneed
 - The Good for Nothing Tree by Amy-Jill Levine & Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
 - The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson