

**Prophets: Jonah**  
**Week Three**  
**Upper Elementary (Ages 8-11)**

**Materials Needed:** Straws of various lengths for Draw Straws game (optional), one envelope per person, one Jonah template per person, one drinking straw per person, scissors, markers, and tape. Teeth templates and other decorating items (foam pieces, googly eyes, colored paper, glue and glitter, etc.) are optional.

**Lesson 1: Review**

Prompt: We've started talking about prophets. Does anyone remember what a prophet is? What does a prophet do? What makes them so special? [Brainstorm/Guess/Share. Not everyone agrees on the definition of a prophet, but in the Bible, prophets are often people who have had direct contact with God. In many of the stories we'll talk about, God talks directly to the prophets. They are also people who try to change the world – either with their teaching or with their actions.]

Prompt: Last week, we talked about Samuel. Do you remember what happened when God contacted him? [Guess/Share. He didn't know who was talking to him.]

Prompt: Eventually, Samuel figured out that God was calling him, and he became a wonderful prophet for God.

**Lesson 2a: Jonah Runs Away**

Prompt: Today, we're going to talk about Jonah. Have you ever heard of him? [Share]

Prompt: When God called Jonah to be a prophet, he was not interested! In fact, Jonah tried to run away. He got on a ship and tried to sail in the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go. Have you ever had that experience – when someone wanted you to do something, but you really didn't want to do it? How did it turn out? [Share]

Prompt: As we'll see, Jonah's little plan to sail away from God didn't work.

[This story is written out as a play, so you can assign roles. The roles are: narrator, captain, sailors, Jonah, God, king. The narrator has the most lines; the rest of the parts are fairly small. The scene begins with Jonah sleeping in the bottom of the ship. The captain is on deck. If you are short on time, simply read the story aloud.]

**Read:** Jonah 1:4-6 (Jonah Tries to Run Away from God)

**Narrator:** But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up.

[All kids make storm noises – whooshing sounds, thunder claps, etc.]

**Narrator:** Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him,

**Captain [to the sleeping Jonah]:** What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.

Prompt: As the storm was raging, the sailors decided to cast lots to figure out who was to blame for the storm. Do you know what it means to “cast lots?” Basically casing lots is like using rock-paper-scissors to make a decision. Or drawing straws. Have you all played those games before? [Share]

***Creative Response 1: Draw Straws and/or Play Rock-Paper-Scissors***

Play a couple of rounds of drawing straws. Usually, the person who draws the shortest straw is “it” or “out.” In this case, the person who draws the shortest straw is “the one who is to blame for the raging storm.”

You can also play a few rounds of rock-paper-scissors, which most of them will already know.

Prompt: Casting lots is also like playing eeny-meeny-miney-mo. Do you ever do that? What version do you use? [Share]

Prompt: What kinds of decisions do you use these “casting lot” techniques for? Would you use them for important decisions? [Share]

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Prompt: In ancient times, people often used games like this to make important decisions. In this case, there was a storm raging, and they were very afraid. They were all trying to figure out whose fault it was and what to do to survive. We don’t know exactly what they did, but in the end, the game showed that Jonah was to blame for the raging storm. Here’s what happened next.

[The scene begins with everyone sitting in a circle.]

**Read:** Jonah 1:11-16 (Jonah Tries to Run Away from God)

**Narrator:** Then they said to him,

**Sailors [to Jonah]:** What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?

**Narrator:** For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them,

**Jonah:** Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.

**Narrator:** Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the Lord,

**Sailors:** Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man’s life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.

**Narrator:** So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

Prompt: The sailors didn't really want to throw Jonah overboard, but they didn't know what else to do. It seemed to be the only way to stop the storm and save the ship and themselves. What do you think happened to Jonah after he was thrown overboard? [Brainstorm/Guess/Share. You can make it multiple choice if you wish: Raise your hand if you think Jonah sank to the bottom of the sea. Raise your hand if you think Jonah was swallowed by a big fish. Raise your hand if you think a dolphin swam by and saved Jonah. Raise your hand if you think Jonah was saved by sailors from another ship.]

Prompt: Let's see what happened. In this scene, Jonah is sitting, alone and afraid.

**Read:** Jonah 1:17 and excerpts from Jonah 2 (A Psalm of Thanksgiving)

**Narrator:** But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights....Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

**Jonah:** I called to the Lord out of my distress,  
and he answered me;

...You cast me into the deep,  
into the heart of the seas,

As my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered the Lord;  
and my prayer came to you,

But I with the voice of thanksgiving  
will sacrifice to you....

**Narrator:** ....Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

Prompt: What do you think? Do you think it's possible for a man to be swallowed by a fish? What kind of fish do you think could do that? [Brainstorm. No right answer here. People have been debating it forever. One researcher even showed that it was highly unlikely that a whale could swallow a human – but a shark could! Some have suggested that it was a special, unknown fish created by God for just this occasion. Others think it's just a metaphor.]

Prompt: While Jonah is in the belly of the fish, he begins to pray to God. If you were stuck in the belly of a fish, what would you say to God? [Share]

Prompt: It is interesting that this part of the Bible story is called a Psalm of Thanksgiving. It even says, "...with a voice of Thanksgiving." Why in the world might Jonah be thankful to be in the belly of the fish?! [Brainstorm/Guess. Maybe because he finally realized that what God was asking him to do was important. Maybe because he was saved from the storm.]

Prompt: Jonah has finally decided not to run away from God and his special mission.

**Read:** Excerpts from Jonah 3 (Conversion of Nineveh)

**Narrator:** The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying,

**God:** Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.

**Narrator:** So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. . . .Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out,

**Jonah:** Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!

**Narrator:** And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

[Sackcloth was a shirt, usually made of coarse black goat's hair. It would have been very itchy. It was used as a sign that you were sorry for any wrong things you had done.]

**Narrator:** When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh:

**King:** . . .All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.

**Narrator:** When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Prompt: Wow – Jonah was successful. He proclaimed his message, got the people of Nineveh to repent, and God decided not to punish them! Have you ever experienced that kind of success – where you had an idea about something and it actually worked out? How did you feel? [Share]

Prompt: So how do you think Jonah felt about that? [Brainstorm/Guess. They'll probably guess that Jonah was happy.]

Prompt: Jonah actually got mad at God for backing down. Jonah ran around and told everyone in Nineveh that they were going to get punished, and then nothing happened! Have you ever had that experience – when you thought someone was going to get in big trouble and then they just said “sorry” and got off really easily. How did that make you feel? [Share]

Prompt: Have you ever, like the people of Nineveh, gotten off easier than you thought you would? Was it a relief? [Share]

Prompt: Eventually, Jonah realized that he should have been happy the people of Nineveh didn't get punished.

Prompt: The Jonah story is also talked about in other religions. Jewish people talk about this story because it is in our Old Testament, which is part of the Bible that they read, too. But this story is also mentioned in the Qur'an. Do you know/remember what the Qur'an is? [It is like the Bible, but for people who are Muslim. Show a copy of the Qur'an if you have one.]

Prompt: Here are some of the verses in the Qur'an that talk about Jonah. If you listen carefully, you will hear that they are talking about the same story.

**Read:** Surah 37: 139-142, 145, 147-148

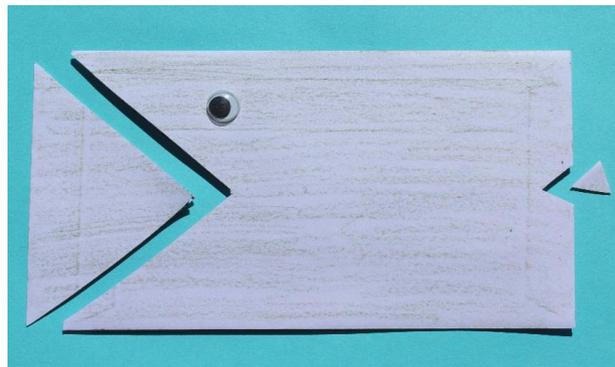
And lo! Jonah verily was one of those sent (to warn)  
When he fled unto the laden ship,  
And then drew lots and was of those rejected;  
And the fish swallowed him while he was blame-worthy;  
... Then We cast him on a desert shore while he was sick;  
... And We sent him to a hundred thousand (folk) or more  
And they believed, therefore We gave them comfort for a while.

### ***Creative Response 2: Jonah in the Big Fish***

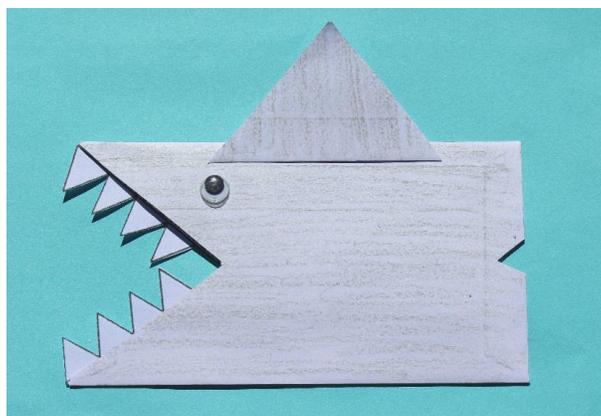
Give each kid an envelope and let them seal it. Let them color/decorate both the envelope and the template of Jonah. The envelope will eventually be the “big fish,” so that might influence how they color/decorate it.

Once finished, have them cut a large triangle out of the left side of the envelope and tape it onto the top as a fin. The cut-out will be the mouth of the fish.

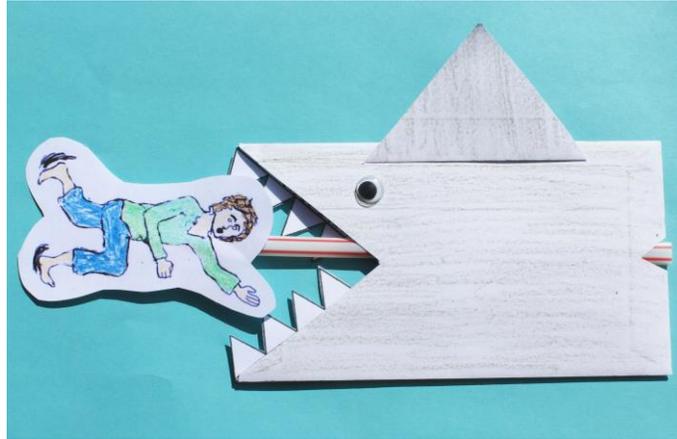
Then, have them cut out a small triangle on the right side of the envelope in the center. This will be the opening for the straw.



If they have time, they can also make teeth – either by using the templates or simply by cutting out some teeth on their own. To use the templates, place glue on the front side of the teeth, over the words. Then glue the tab to the back of the fish/envelope.



Tape one end of the flexible straw to the Jonah template and stick it into the fish. Now, they can grab the straw at the tail end of the fish and move it, as though Jonah were moving in and out of the mouth of the fish.



**Sources:**

- 1) *Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2007. Print.
- 2) Pickthall, Mohammed Marmaduke. *The Glorious Qur'an*. Trans. Elmhurst, NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc. 2000. Print

### **Scene One: Storm raging, Jonah asleep at the bottom of the ship, Captain on deck**

**Narrator:** But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up.

[All kids make storm noises – whooshing sounds, thunder claps, etc.]

**Narrator:** Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him,

**Captain [to the sleeping Jonah]:** What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.

### **Scene Two: Everyone in a circle, Storm still raging**

**Narrator:** Then they said to him,

**Sailors [to Jonah]:** What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?

**Narrator:** For the sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them,

**Jonah:** Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.

**Narrator:** Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the Lord,

**Sailors:** Please, O Lord, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.

**Narrator:** So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

### Scene Three: Jonah sitting alone and afraid

**Narrator:** But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights....Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

**Jonah:** I called to the Lord out of my distress,  
and he answered me;

...You cast me into the deep,  
into the heart of the seas,

As my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered the Lord;  
and my prayer came to you,

But I with the voice of thanksgiving  
will sacrifice to you....

**Narrator:** ....Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

### Scene Four: Jonah is Free

**Narrator:** The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying,

**God:** Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.

**Narrator:** So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord....Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out,

**Jonah:** Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!

**Narrator:** And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

[Sackcloth was a shirt, usually made of coarse black goat's hair. It would have been very itchy. It was used as a sign that you were sorry for any wrong things you had done.]

**Narrator:** When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh:

**King:** ...All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.

**Narrator:** When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Teeth Templates

