

## Welcome (or Welcome Back!) to Dwell

If your church is using *Dwell* for the second year or beyond, this fun family event for kids in grades K-5 and their families is a great way to kick off your new season. Below you'll find ideas and instructions to help you

- **connect** with families and tell them about what their children will be learning.
- **encourage** families to nurture faith at home by using *Dwell's* at-home resources.
- **introduce** leaders to kids and their families.

### 1. Get Ready

**Set the date.** Make it as easy as possible for families to attend your event by holding it immediately after a church service—a time when families and *Dwell* leaders are already in the building. Include a snack or light lunch for extra fun.

**Choose a location.** You'll want families to interact with each other, so the ideal space will allow you to seat families around tables.

**Publicize the event.** In addition to “save the date” announcements and reminders in church services and in church bulletins, send out an email or personally give each family an invitation to the event. Be sure to include a simple way for them to reply so you'll know how many people to plan for. Remember to invite your teaching team too!

#### Gather the following supplies:

- A Bible
- Colored markers, one set per table
- Nineteen reproducible story symbols from the following *Dwell* Year 1 Leader Guides:
  - Imagine, Year 1, Unit 1, printable pages 52-54
  - Wonder, Year 1, Unit 5, printable pages 59-61
  - Marvel, Year 1, Unit 1, printable pages 52-54.

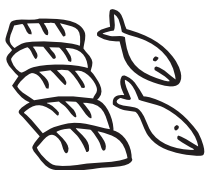
Make color copies of these symbols from the Year 1 Leader Guides. Copy and cut apart enough copies so that every table will have a set of the symbols from either Imagine or Wonder or Marvel. If you have more than six or seven people seated at a table, repeat some symbols.

#### Tip

Serve a special cake at this event! Visit your local bakery and request a white cake with *God's Big Story* written in blue icing. Provide the bakery with a few simple story symbols and ask them to decorate the cake by “drawing” the symbols on it.

#### Note

We've intentionally selected Year 1 *Dwell* symbols for the children to work with at their tables and during the activity because they'll be able to identify most of them and tell their families about their meaning. However, if you're using this event following a Year 2 cycle of *Dwell*, you may prefer to use Year 2 symbols for the same reasons. In that case, we'd suggest using the five Old Testament symbols from Imagine, Year 2, Unit 5; all six symbols from Wonder, Year 2, Unit 4; and the five Old Testament symbols from Marvel, Year 2, Unit 5 rather than the symbols listed at left.



- Large colored versions of the six symbols from *Imagine*, Year 1, Unit 1; the seven symbols from *Wonder*, Year 1, Unit 5; and the six symbols from *Marvel*, Year 1, Unit 1.



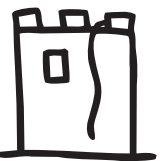
- Large, colored versions of various story symbols from Year 2 to decorate the room, along with yarn and clothespins to string them up or wall putty to attach them to the wall.
- Samples of *Dwell* to show families. You'll need Show and Share papers from *Imagine* and *Wonder*, Bible bookmarks from *Marvel*, and a boxed set of God's Big Story cards. If you don't plan to hold a separate meeting with parents of middle schoolers, you might also like to show families the Dive monthly magazine and devotional.



- Copies of any *Dwell* at Home resources you plan to share with families.
- Optional: colorful paper tablecloths from the dollar store to cover each table and create a celebratory atmosphere.
- Any snack or food items you'd like to serve. (You'll find a fun cookie decorating idea under the Easy Extras at the end of this planner.) Depending on your snack you may also need plates, cups, forks, and so on.

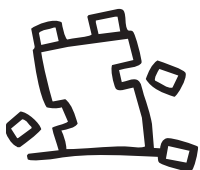


**Plan to share** at the event about how the symbols are used in *Dwell* sessions. Or, ask one or more leaders in advance to talk briefly about how the symbols are used and how the children respond to them.



## 2. Get Set

**Prepare the room.** Cover tables with tablecloths. Place a set of markers and reproducible story symbols on each table. Set aside the large colored story symbols you'll need for the activity. Decorate the room with more large colored story symbols from *Dwell* Year 2. Set up any food items you'll be serving.



## 3. Go!

**Welcome families** as they enter, and invite them to sit together as a family at one of the tables you've set up. (Smaller families may enjoy sitting at a table with another family.)



**Encourage families** to look at the story symbols on their table and to guess which stories they represent. Let everyone know they are welcome to color the symbols with markers while they are waiting for the event to begin.



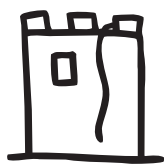
**Thank everyone** for coming and share how much you and the children's ministry team at church are looking forward to the upcoming education year. Let the kids see how excited all of you are about spending time with them!



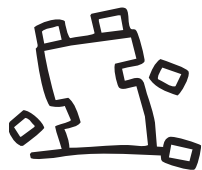
**Explain** to parents/guardians that attending a children's ministry program at your church is a small but important way to help nurture their children's faith.

### Tip

Hopefully you'll still have the colored Year 1 symbols on hand, but if not, purchase complete sets from [faithaliveresources.org](http://faithaliveresources.org). In a pinch you could also use a copy of each of the reproducible story symbols that you'll be placing on each table.



Point out that the most significant faith nurture happens at home, and that the curriculum you use each week is designed to help them with that important job. If you plan to share any Dwell at Home resources with families this year, introduce those now.



**Point out** that story symbols are an important part of *Dwell* because each one reminds us of one of God's stories. Share—or invite one or more leaders to share—some of the ways the symbols were used last year.



**Ask** if everyone has had a chance to look at the story symbols on their table. Explain that some tables may have symbols from Old Testament stories; others may have symbols from New Testament stories. Mention that many of the symbols will be familiar to the children because they saw them last year.



**Play** a symbol sorting game. Begin with the set of symbols from *Imagine*, Year 1, Unit 1. Invite six volunteers to come forward and stand in a row. Give each person a large, colored symbol to hold up and invite the audience to guess which story each symbol represents. (Mix up the symbols in advance so that when you hand them out they are not in the correct order.) Affirm correct responses and offer clues if necessary to help people guess the answers. Then challenge the six volunteers to arrange themselves in the correct order of when each story occurred. Invite the group to help you thank the volunteers with a round of applause.



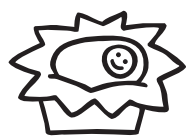
**Repeat** the process with the seven symbols from *Wonder* and the six symbols from *Marvel*. (Note: You'll want to explain that the Marvel symbols all represent parables—special stories that Jesus told about God's kingdom—so there is no specific order in which to put them.) Make things fun by having the group thank the volunteers differently each time—perhaps by snapping fingers or waving hands high in the air or slapping hands on legs.



**Introduce or Reintroduce** *God's Big Story* cards.

#### Tip

Kids love to watch their parents participate in something fun, and they also love to show parents what they know. Consider selecting parents as your symbol-holding volunteers and choose children to tell the meaning of each symbol. The kids will also enjoy watching the parents try to put the symbols in the correct order (which can be harder than it sounds).



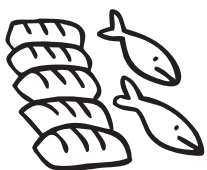
#### Option 1 (Introduce the Cards)

If your congregation has used *Dwell* before but you're presenting God's Big Story cards to your families for the very first time, you'll want to take time to play a few rounds of this devotional game together. To do this, briefly explain how God's Big Story cards work, using the instruction card enclosed in the box as a reference. Tell about the different ways families can use them at home to fit their lifestyle and the ages of their kids. Some key points:



- Every story card is connected to part of God's story in the Bible and every card has its own story symbol.
- They can read the passages from Scripture, from the kids' take-home papers, or from a children's Bible.
- For every story card there are six different responses for families to do: they might retell the story in a fun way, wonder together about something from the story, pray together, offer praise, share a story or experience of their own that connects to the story, or respond by doing something.
- They get to choose an activity by rolling a special colored die and doing the activity that it matches.





- They can choose to read one story and its card over a week and roll for a different response each day, or they can choose a new card each day, rolling the die and doing one response from the back.



- Families can select the cards that match up with the stories their child or children heard at church that week, or they can opt to start at the beginning and work their way through the box.



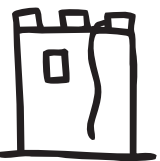
- Emphasize how easy, flexible, and fun it is to use these cards at home!

Hold up the story symbol for card #14 (the sandals symbol used earlier in your game) and recall what it represents. Give each table an open boxed set of story cards and invite them to pull out card #14 and then to listen carefully as you tell the story behind the symbol. Read Genesis 12:1-9. Then invite each table group to roll the die and try a few rounds of responses.

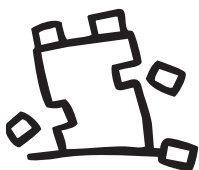


### Option 2 (Reintroduce the cards)

If you have distributed the God's Big Story cards in the past and at this event there are a small number of families who are new to the program and will be receiving the cards, it would be great to have a family that has been using the cards at home share what they've enjoyed about them. Then, to get the new families excited about using the cards—and to encourage those who may not have used their set much at home—open one of the boxes and play a few rounds with the whole group this way:



- Hold up the story symbol of the sandals and recall what it represents.
- Pull story card #14 from the box. Invite everyone to listen carefully as you tell the story behind the symbol. Open your Bible and read Genesis 12:1-9.
- Ask a child to come forward and roll the die. Read the activity that matches the color shown on the die, and invite families to do what it says.
- Ask another child to roll the die and play one more round.



**Point out** that each week every child will bring home a miniature version of the story symbol introduced in their small group. They'll be able to use these symbols to locate the matching card from their God's Big Story cards set at home. Hold up the learner's resources for each level and point out where their symbols will be found as you highlight what is unique about each level. Some things to mention:



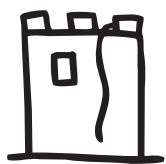
- Imagine and Wonder kids will take home a Show and Share paper each week. Ask a child volunteer from that age group to tell everyone why they are called Show and Share papers. Affirm that they are to show and share with someone at home. Explain that at both levels, Show and Share papers contain a version of the Bible story to read at home, which can also be used as the reading for God's Big Story cards.



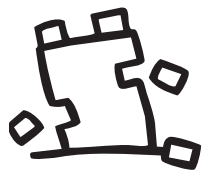
- The Marvel take-home is designed to be an interactive Bible bookmark—by the end of the year your child's Bible should be full of them!
- Mention that every six weeks kids will receive a new Memory Challenge—an important piece of Scripture to memorize. Explain that to help kids memorize the verses, they'll be singing them at church! Let parents know that those songs are available for purchase and download at [dwellcurriculum.org](http://dwellcurriculum.org), iTunes, and Amazon.com (search for DwellSongs Year 1 and DwellSongs Year 2, and Sign with Me Preschool songs.)



- Optional: show resources used at the Dive level—the monthly magazine kids use at church and the fun devotional to be used at home.



**Introduce** each of your leaders, and ask them to tell a few things about themselves (favorite food, hobby, and so on). Let kids know how excited their leaders are to get to know them and to learn more about God's story with them. Give them a round of applause to thank them in advance for the time they will be dedicating to sharing God's stories with the children of your congregation and with any other kids God sends their way.



**Close** in prayer, using the prayer found on God's Big Story card #78 or #93, inviting the children to suggest actions for the underlined words before you begin.

## Easy Extras

If you'd like to host a longer family event, you can include one or more of these additional fun activities:



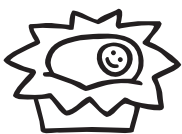
**Symbol Cookies:** Set up a table with plain round sugar cookies and colored cake decorating gel. Invite everyone to use the decorating gel to decorate a cookie to look like one of the God's Big Story symbols. (Place a few symbols on the table or hang them nearby for inspiration.)



**Roll the Symbol:** Turn a square tissue box into a large die by covering each of its six sides with a different story symbol from printable pages of the Imagine, Wonder, and Marvel Year 1 leader guides. Players can take turns rolling the die and then either telling something about the story represented by the symbol that lands on top or asking a wondering question about it. Let them know that if they don't know the story, the wondering question can be "I wonder what story this symbol stands for?" Have a leader available who can give clues or provide answers if people can't figure out a symbol.



**Timelines:** Give each family a set of markers and a long strip of paper. (Cut lengths of paper from a roll of mural paper or tape two sheets of printer paper side by side to get a length that's 8.5 x 22 inches or 21 x 28 cm.) Invite them to begin by drawing a long line along the length of the page. Next ask them to use the colored markers to create a family timeline, marking significant dates in their family history. For example, when a child was born or adopted, a move, a special vacation, the arrival of a family pet, a death, when kids started school, or any other event that was important in their lives. End by asking them to take a marker that's a different color than the one they used to make their timeline. Instruct them to use this different color to make another long line that's attached to the first one. Explain that this line represents God, because God was there in every day of each family's life too! Ask families to add one more thing to their timeline—the words "God's Big Story" as a heading on the page—because just like Noah, Moses, Joseph, Ruth, Esther, Mary, Matthew, and all the other people you learn about in the Bible, each person in the room today is part of God's story too!



**Memory Challenge:** Give each family a verse from Scripture. You could use the Memory Challenge verses from Year 1 or Year 2 of *Dwell* if you'd like, or a verse of your own choosing. Give each family five minutes to create simple sign language or actions to go with the words in their verse and then invite them to teach it to the rest of the group. Explain that when you use more than one of your senses to learn something, you're much more likely to remember it. That's why we sing the Scripture verses we're learning in *Dwell* and use sign language or other motions when learning the words. And that's why kids not only hear the story with *Dwell*, they retell it with words, actions, pictures and more!

