

REACHING CHILDREN

By

Mildred Morningstar

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CHAPTER SIX

THE FLANNELGRAPH

DOES YOUR CLASS need renewed interest?

Is it sometimes hard to keep the attention of your boys and girls?

Are the children unable to remember what you told them last week?

Then the answer to your problem is the flannelgraph.

The results with boys and girls are startling. They are fascinated by the pictures "that won't fall over."

Their minds and hearts are impressed by the truth more deeply when it enters the eye-gate as well as the ear-gate. And they remember - oh, how they remember! - the stories when told this new way.

We are told that we remember 10% of what we hear, 50% of what we see, and 80% of what we see, hear, and do. The flannelgraph adapts itself to all of these.

The child sees the story on the board before him, he hears the story from his teacher, and he "does" the story later when the teacher lets him review it on the flannelgraph. Thus it becomes a very part of him.

Most everyone now knows what the flannelgraph is-a method of portraying truth by means of pictures and objects pasted on flannel, which may be placed against an upright board covered with flannel. The flannel on the picture adheres to the flannel on the board, and the pictures remain in place.

It is also referred to as the feltograph or flannel board. [101]

Attendance in various classes has skyrocketed since the advent of this new method, teachers who before were mediocre have found new enthusiasm in their classes, and more boys and girls have been touched with the precious Gospel of grace.

Because there are as many different ways of working with the flannelgraph as there are people who use it, different materials and methods will be discussed and the reader may decide which is most appropriate for him.

THE BOARD

Of the materials needed, the first to consider is a board.

This may be as inexpensive as corrugated cardboard, or as elaborate as a board and easel together which fold as a suitcase. The cardboard, corrugated on both sides, may be taken from a large heavy grocery box and covered with black or gray flannel. Cut with a knife to 2x3 feet, and be sure the corners are square.

The flannel may be glued on the back side of the board, but not on the front as that destroys its sticking qualities. Another piece of material a little less than 2x3 feet may be fastened to the back which will cover the raw edges and make a neater board. This board will be easy to carry, will not take much room to store, and with reasonable care will last a long time. Of course, a table is needed on which to place it while telling the story.

The folding easel and board is an advantage for the Christian worker who tells the story in many different places, where he will not always have a table.

Material as well as the legs of the easel can be carried inside. The flannel is not already on these boards but must be put on after it is up. [102]

Use a couple of thumb tacks or a piece of flannel larger than the board so that a good bit of it will hang down in back. In this way no fasteners are needed. There are several different models on the market.

Just remember that you will be carrying whatever it weighs and consider that.

Many of them have a blackboard finish which is a very desirable feature. Time must be allowed before every meeting to assemble the board, but you will generally find in every group some mechanical boy who will delight to do the job for you. However, always supervise until the child learns how and you may save yourself some broken material.

Some one willing to spend a little time and a very little money may make a durable and satisfactory board from plywood, 2x3 feet.

Paint it with blackboard enamel which may be purchased from a hardware or paint store. Thus, the blackboard may be used for the songs, puzzles, and memory verses, and with one yard square of flannel thrown over the board it is ready for the story.

This size board is good, as yard wide flannel fits very nicely.

If a larger board is used the material must be cut the lengthwise of the goods and much more is

required. However, this size is good for the small and medium sized figures, and can be used with the larger figures.

Some use a board 3x4 feet for the larger figures. An audience up to 250 or 300, if seated close together, can see the figures on the small board.

For ordinary class work and children's meetings these are recommended. The traveling children's evangelist who gets the very best equipment will prefer the large figures and board. If extremely large groups of children are contacted, he may prefer even a larger board. [103]

THE SCENES

What kind of background shall I use? This is one of the first questions.

For you who are beginning with a new set of children and have all the work of preparing figures for the first time, plain black flannel or vello cloth will be very satisfactory. The bright colored figures show up well against it, and the children will like it even if the scene is not worked out.

As time goes on you can get a few scenes, but this is not necessary to start. One of the first scenes should be a general outdoor one which can be used for most Bible stories.

This may be just a general landscape with mountains or hills in the background. One method consists in cutting various strips of flannel or vello cloth and building the scene before the children. Thus one strip would be green for the grass, another blue for the sky, and a third dark blue or purple for the hills.

Other pieces may be used for a lake, mountains may be omitted, and a stretch of oriental houses substituted. This way several pieces of flannel or vello are used for one scene.

They may be interchanged with other sets of scenery.

For instance, the tan ground of a desert scene maybe used with the blue sky of the regular scene.

An orange sunset sky may be used with a seaside scene.

The advantage of this method is its interchangeability, but the disadvantage is that it is quite difficult to keep track of each separate piece, and sometimes takes considerable time to decide just which pieces to use.

The Mead scenes are of this type and are very attractive in vello cloth. Vello cloth is a new cloth quite superior to flannel, in that it does not wrinkle easily and has more body than flannel. [104]

One side is not fuzzy, but objects adhere nevertheless. This side is used for the drawing and the results are much nicer than when flannel is used.

The Munn scenes are beautiful indeed, but out of the reach of the pocketbook of most children's workers. They are drawn on wool felt, and felt figures come with every scene. They are so

constructed that they may be used on both sides, which really cuts the price in two, making them cost about the same as the Mead scenes.

For a special occasion one of these scenes would add a beauty and dignity that would not soon be forgotten by the audience. And anyone who can afford them for all flannelgraph work certainly has great cause to rejoice.

Using a yard of unbleached muslin, white flannel, or vello cloth, and drawing a complete scene on it with crayon, payons or oils, is another way to make a background. This may be done by the teacher or some artistic child or friend.

The beautiful pictures on Beginner and Primary leaflets furnish many suggestions for making backgrounds.

These may be copied by one who has no artistic talent, or who has never done any drawing.

It does take quite a bit of time, but because the flannel especially permits new lines on top of mistakes, without showing, it is possible for an amateur to get satisfactory results by copying from a good picture. Most people are afraid to try. If you don't have the money to buy a scene, do try to make one. Or get some one else to try for you.

Is there a scene outside the temple? Find a picture with a temple in it, and seek to copy it. Notice each detail. Do not be dismayed because the task seems too big. Ask the Lord to help you. [105]

The author has absolutely no artistic talent, but has amazed herself at what a little time and application will do.

One thing, remember both scenes and figures should not be too brilliant in color, as they may clash when put together. Consider what the total effect will be rather than concentrating on making one item.

These scenes drawn all in one piece are somewhat easier to use and are more convenient for the teacher. They do not provide quite as much interest for the children as the other type, but are very satisfactory. Of course, they may be used over and over again.

For an easy-to-make night scene, take a yard of dark blue and paste a few packaged stars in the sky.

Cut a circle or crescent from gold paper for the moon, and the children are transported into long-ago night with Jacob or Nicodemus.

For one who has not begun the flannelgraph work, this may sound confusing. Just remember that the only scene you need to start with is a piece of black. The children's imagination will supply trees, sky, mountains, etc.

THE FIGURES

Although a great variety of figures for Bible stories are now available, it is generally best for the beginner to choose those figures which come with the stories already written.

In this way he secures additional help and instructions, and is started on this new way of Bible teaching with much more ease. After he has become accustomed to teaching the flannelgraph way he will wish to get additional figures even though the stories do not accompany them.

Out of his own experience and Bible study he will be able to coordinate the figures with the story. [106]

The majority of figures are 9-11 inches in height, which is ideal for the board 2 by 3 feet.

The larger figures are good for some special occasion or for the meetings where over one hundred children attend. They may also be used with a small group but are not necessary. The cost is considerably more.

The small figures may also be used with an audience up to about three or four hundred, but - the larger ones would be preferred for that size group.

The following chart may help in selecting your material.

Material	Producer	Size	Price
Figures with stories for books as " <i>Gospel of John</i> ," " <i>Genesis</i> ," etc	Irene B. Ranny	9-11 in.	moderately priced
Figures, not stories, following themes, such as " <i>Life of CHRIST</i> ."	Hollenbeck	9-11 in.	moderately priced
Figures for individual stories - no stories furnished.	Story-a-Graph	15-20 in.	more expensive

One nice thing about the flannelgraph is that the materials may be used over and over again in new ways.

- Rebecca with her pot may also be the woman at the well;
- Miriam watching the baby Moses may in another setting become the little maid who told Naaman's wife of her GOD.
- Abraham may pose as Moses, and
- innumerable Bible characters may on the flannelgraph play a double role.

Of course, care must be taken not to have the figure take on a new personality too soon or the children will discover the ruse. [107]

As to the preparation: color the figures first, glue flannel to the back, dry thoroughly, and last of all cut out.

If the figures are cut out before they are dry, the likelihood is that the figure will curl. The completed sheet may be placed under the rug, or the sheet cut into sections and placed in a very large book to dry.

The figures may be colored with crayons, water colors, or show card colors. The crayons are the least desirable, and the show card colors the most desirable.

I have seen work done beautifully in crayons, and some done in show card colors that left very much to be desired.

Everyone improves with practice no matter what medium is used.

Show card colors are also called tempera paints, and poster paints. They come in bottles, may be thinned in water for tints, or mixed with other colors for different shades. When, after standing a long time, they become thick, add water and let stand overnight. With red, yellow, blue, black, and white, almost every different color is possible. However, if much of this work is done the painter will wish to buy the additional bottles to save the time of mixing the colors.

Mixing Chart

Minimum colors needed

Red and yellow - orange	Red
Red and blue - purple	Blue
Yellow and blue - green	White
Red and white - pink	Black
Blue and white - pale blue	
Purple and white - lavender	
Black and white - gray	
Red and yellow and small amount blue - brown	
Brown and white - tan	
Red and yellow and white - flesh color [108]	

Beautiful pastels may be made by adding white to any given color.

Jar lids make excellent containers in which to mix the paint. Not much is required for painting quite a bit, but be sure to mix enough as it is difficult to match a color that has been mixed.

Flesh color may be made by mixing red, yellow, and white. Pink is not a real flesh color. Take a look at your own arm when trying to mix flesh color.

Remember also that the outdoor fishermen and shepherd were somewhat darker than we are.

Crayons may be used one color on top of another and rubbed with the finger tip to secure a smooth blend.

One tip which has been helpful to many who are not artistically inclined is to make the folds of the garment darker than the garment itself if the figures are not shaded. If they are shaded, the shaded part should be colored darker than the remainder of the garment.

Most people figure as I did. If a dress is red, it is red all over. But to the eye it does not appear this way. The folds seem to be a darker red.

Where there are lines in the garment, paint this line a darker color, and you will be pleased with the result. This shading may occur in the skirts, the headdress, the hair, the sashes, and even in the hands, if they are prominent in the scene.

Wherever there would be shadows, these places should be painted a darker shade of the same color.

Do not worry about this too much at first, but do the best you can. The Lord made things beautiful when He made this earth, and I believe that He would be honored with figures neatly done and true to life. Many suggestions may be gained by studying the work of the masters.

Coat the back of the sheet of figures with a liquid glue and press flannel against it. [109]

Some say that the figures should be mounted on a heavier paper or cardboard before gluing to flannel, but very satisfactory results are obtained if flannel completely covers the back of the figure. The extra weight of the cardboard sometimes causes the figure to fall from the board.

Then, too, a figure with just flannel on the back may be bent to carry from place to place, or to store, and will not leave a crease as would the cardboard.

The flannel must completely cover the back of the figure.

Of course, scraps may be used for the work of backing the figures, and it does not matter what color or what quality flannel. Some one who has been sewing for a baby may have an abundance of flannel to donate.

Remember to completely dry the figures after painting and gluing before cutting them out.

It helps to either number the figure or to write the name of the character on the back.

There is no use denying it, a great deal of work is required to prepare the scenes and figures for the flannelgraph, but anyone who has used it over a period of time will testify that it is well worth the trouble.

In some cities the women who are teaching classes get together for an all-day meeting and prepare figures together.

If the gathering has been well planned and all materials are present and ready to be used, a great deal can be accomplished in a pleasant way.

In other cities the women set aside part of August and prepare their figures for most of the year

to come.

Where these groups work together so well, why could not a library of figures be established?

All the figures required for one story could be placed in one envelope, with a smaller envelope and card placed on the outside as is contained in a library book. [110]

One of the women could be librarian, and send out notices for stories overdue, or see that none were lost.

To get such a collection, no one would be permitted to borrow any stories until he had contributed a certain number of stories.

These could be inspected by a committee each year, or more frequently, as decided by the group.

Each member could be taxed another story, and thus the collection would grow and be more useful.

After joining the group the stories would no longer belong to the maker but to the group. In this way a great deal of use could be derived from the figures made.

One person could be assigned to inspect the figures frequently, so that soiled ones would be discarded.

To store the figures, manila folders, or large envelopes may be used. These may be labeled on the flap or front as to what story is contained. You will soon find that there are some figures which are used frequently. It is a question whether to store such a figure with one story and remember which one it is with, or to store all such versatile figures in one folder by themselves.

The latter seems to be the more satisfactory.

Let no one think that just because he uses the flannelgraph souls will be saved, and that if he does not use it souls will not be saved. GOD works through a clean vessel to give forth His Word in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT. If our hearts are not clean, if we do not give forth the pure Word of GOD, and if we do not go forth in the power of the HOLY SPIRIT, we can make figures until we are blue in the face for all it will prosper the work of GOD. [111]

This is a means that has been used of the Lord, it is worth the time and the trouble, and you will find that it does fascinate children.

We must, however, look to the Lord to work in the hearts and lives of the children, depend upon Him for the message and expect Him to bring about the results. [112]

~ end of chapter 6 ~
