

# ESTHER: STANDING UP FOR THE OPPRESSED

## Team time topic talk

The Book of Esther is like a pantomime with evil villains, pantomime dames and a beautiful heroine. It is a strange book to have in the Bible, because God is not mentioned once. Instead, we have to look much harder to see God's purpose unfolding through coincidence and lucky chances.

The story starts with the drunken Persian king divorcing his first wife because she would not obey him. He holds a beauty pageant to find a new wife. He selects Esther, but he is not aware she is Jewish. Then the coincidence occurs, which the whole story hinges upon. Esther's guardian, Mordecai, overhears an assassination plot. He tells Esther, who 'just happens' now to have the king's ear as his new wife.

The evil villain, Haman, plots to destroy all Jews in the kingdom. He gets the king, mindlessly, to sign the decree. Esther and Mordecai devise a strategy to save their people – to tell the king she is Jewish, and unmask Haman for the villain he is. Their plot works, and Esther and Mordecai triumph over Haman and all their enemies. The people of Israel are saved.

The story invites us to consider how oppression and prejudice kills and maims both body and spirit. Esther, the plucky heroine, risks her own life to save people from discrimination and death. We know that in our own time, and in our own society, things are not fair for everyone. This story shows that God sides with the oppressed and vulnerable – a lesson we would all do well to heed.

a) How, in your own life, do you work actively for those who suffer discrimination and disadvantage? If you cannot think of something, how could you start?

b) In this story, God works through others to achieve justice. Who do you consider are people like Esther and Mordecai in our own time?

c) How are you called personally to help bring about God's plans for fairness and justice? How as a church could we do more?

Take time to pray together for peace, justice and fairness in God's world, and for you to treat the children and families in your holiday club fairly in today's sessions. Ask God to make you aware of anyone who is feeling left out or different or uncomfortable in any way, whether among the children or the adults.

## Detectives' den

**Arrival activity: Secret messages – God is in the story, but not visible.**

You will need paper and pencil, OR paper, lemon juice, a paintbrush and a torch or LED candle.

Place one piece of paper on top of another. Write on the upper piece of paper with a pen or pencil, pressing firmly. Write a message like 'God is here, God is with us, God is in the story'. Then remove the top paper and lightly shade the bottom paper with a pencil. And so the message is revealed.

Alternatively, you could use a fine paint brush to write the message in lemon juice. Hold the paper up against a light or by an LED candle to reveal your invisible message.

## Case file update

For activities, see [urc.org.uk/holiday-club](http://urc.org.uk/holiday-club)



## Detective briefing

### Standing up for the oppressed: Esther Monologue drama: Something not quite right

*As you read this, you will find that the children and adults start to join in with the 'not quite right' – you can encourage this by just slightly pausing before you say it.*

The town was very different that day.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
but something in the town was not quite right.

Where were the merchants selling their wares?  
Where were the children with their teddy bears?  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

The people sighed, the people cried,  
Their sorrow was felt far and wide.  
Still the sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

Up in the palace, high on the hill,  
Queen Esther stood shivering, like she had a chill.  
She trembled with fear, she trembled with fright,  
Would the King help her with her plight?

The people sighed, the people cried,  
Their sorrow was felt far and wide.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

Queen Esther stood straight,  
Queen Esther was brave,  
Even though her situation was grave.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

The queen heard their cries  
And the queen felt the call,  
The tug in her heart  
To stand up for them all.

The queen knew she must go to the king  
But this was a very dangerous thing.

Queen Esther knew she had to try

Even if it meant that she might die.

The people sighed, the people cried,  
Their sorrow was felt far and wide.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

Queen Esther went to the King uninvited,  
But when he saw her, he was delighted.  
He called her close, then saw her tears,  
He asked her what it is she fears.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
But something in the town was not quite right.

Queen Esther stood straight,  
Queen Esther was brave,  
“My people will soon all be in graves”.

‘What do you mean?’ the King said with a cry,  
‘A law has been passed that my people must die.’  
The King was aghast, he had to act fast!  
To save all the people, a new law must be passed.

The King made a decree, spread far and wide,  
Queen Esther’s people were no longer to hide,  
No longer were their lives in danger,  
This new law was a real game-changer.

The people sang, the people laughed,  
Their joy was felt far and wide.  
The sun shone bright, with all its might,  
And everything in the town was just right.

Esther was praised and bathed in the glory  
But where do we find God in this story?  
Who were the villains and who gets a cheer?  
What can it teach us about bravery and fear?

**Bible verse:** Proverbs 31:8 ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Defend the rights of all those who have nothing.’



### Video

Animation by Kids on the move

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaS\\_ePAjCvk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaS_ePAjCvk)



## Detectives Investigate

### Games: Fair/unfair

Mark a line on the floor or stretch a skipping rope down the middle of the hall. All players line up on one side of the line. Tell them that they are standing on the 'fair' side of the line, and the other side is 'unfair'. The leader will call out either the word 'fair' or the word 'unfair', and they are to listen and jump quickly to the correct side of the line. The leader calls out a mixture of the words, trying to trick the players by saying the same word several times in a row or speeding up and slowing down.

Older children could have more space between lines, forcing them to exert more energy in a shorter amount of time, or you could occasionally throw in the word 'unsure' with the instruction to jump so that one foot is each side of the line.

### Craft: Queen Esther's nature crown

#### You will need:

- An old cardboard pizza base or large circle of card
- Double-sided sticky tape
- Leaves, grasses and flowers found on a walk (These were all blown off in the wind – be careful not to pick wildflowers or to spoil your neighbour's plants!)
- Alternatively, use paper flowers to decorate the crown.



#### What you do:

Cut a star shape in the middle of the circle of card.

Place the double-sided tape on the card where you want the flowers and leaves to stick.

Take the backing off, and stick your leaves and flowers down.

## Reflection

As a young child, Jesus would have known this story, and understood that bullying was wrong. As Jesus grew up, he stood up for those who were treated unfairly, just like Esther did.

- Have you ever been bullied, or have you ever treated someone else unfairly?
- How can you help someone who has been bullied?
- If you were bullied, what would you do?

### Small group prayer activity

Use paper/card people cut outs (these can be obtained from a pound shop or Wilkos), cut out from recycled card/paper, or even drawn in chalk outside on a church flagged area or garden patio. Alternatively, you could use a paper plate for each child, and have them draw their face on it.

Over the figure or round the edge of the plate, write words that describe who you are – about your appearance, your age, your hobbies, your likes and dislikes etc. Place all the pictures together. Ask God to help you not to treat anyone who is different unfairly, and to make you brave like Esther in standing up for others when people treat them unfairly.

### Recipe: Fairtrade Honey mug cakes

#### Ingredients

- 2 tbsp melted butter (oil)
- 2 tbsp Fairtrade honey (agave nectar)
- 1 medium egg (egg replacer)
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 3 tbsp Fairtrade sugar
- 4 tbsp self-raising flour (gluten free)
- Pinch of salt

#### Directions

- Add the butter, honey, egg and vanilla, and beat with a fork until combined in a mug.
- Add the sugar, flour and salt and beat again until fully combined and smooth.
- Cook in the microwave for around 1 minute 15 seconds to 1 minute 30 seconds.
- Let it cool a bit first before eating!



## Detective update

### Interviewing the suspect: MG interviews Esther

**MG:** Oi! Hello, who are you then?

**Esther:** I'm Esther, Queen of Persia, and the most beautiful girl in the land. Who are you?

**MG:** I ask the questions round here! What's your story then? You look sad -- what's wrong with you?

**Esther:** I am sad, someone is planning to hurt my people.

**MG:** What are you going to do about it, then?

**Esther:** Well, that's the problem. I know I can go and tell the king and I think he will help me, but...

**MG:** Why don't you do it, then?

**Esther:** Well, because I'm scared. You can't just walk into the king's room and speak to him. You have to wait to be called for. You can get into some serious trouble, you know.

**MG:** What are you going to do then?

**Esther:** I don't know, I might go and speak to my uncle Mordecai, and see what he thinks I should do.

**MG:** What if you fail?

**Esther:** I hadn't thought of that. No, it's not an option. Someone has to do something, and I'm the only one. I believe I became Queen of Persia for a day like today. I believe I have to make a difference before it's too late.

**MG:** Now I can see, I know who you are. You're one of us!

### Interviewing the detectives

MG asks questions of the detectives, or holds a quiz to find out what they've learned and what conclusions they've come to.

## Song



Hints are everywhere we look as we investigate this book  
We must search to see if we can find the truths  
With a magnifying glass, and the right amount of sass  
We will be a group of modern supersleuths

Esther lives in Persia, she's a Jew  
And though scared,  
she knew just what she had to do  
She gave Xerxes a request: please don't keep my kin oppressed  
Is she a hero or a villain?  
What d'you think, what's your guess?

## Closing prayer



*At the end of each line, to the words 'Even though we feel small...' the response is 'help us to stand up and speak out'. Children and leaders crouch down small (or sit down if less mobile), and when they hear the cue words, jump up and shout out the response.*

Sometimes people are picked on or bullied.  
Even though we feel small.... Help us to stand up and speak out.

Sometimes people are left out or feel unwanted.  
Even though we feel small.... Help us to stand up and speak out.

Sometimes people are treated unfairly.  
Even though we feel small.... Help us to stand up and speak out.

Sometimes people are going through tough times.  
Even though we feel small.... Help us to stand up and speak out.

Sometimes people don't take care of each other and your world.

Even though we feel small.... Help us to stand up and speak out.

**Amen**

