

Thomas Believes

Grades
5-6

BELIEVE

JOHN 20:19-31

What's happening in this story?

Jesus' grace—not Thomas's doubt—is the focus of this story. Thomas is a follower of Jesus with some questions—questions similar to those the other disciples had, and got answered, when Jesus appeared among them one week earlier. But Thomas was not there when Jesus appeared to the others, and he was not going to be fooled. People do not, as a rule, rise from the dead. He needed to know this wasn't a hoax—he needed to see and touch Jesus' wounds. Jesus gives Thomas exactly what he says he needs. Thomas responds in faith with the words "My Lord and my God!"

What does this story mean for kids?

Kids understand the need to question, and can identify with Thomas. They probably have many questions about this story, in fact—questions that should be encouraged. It is important for kids to know that God loves questions; that Jesus encouraged questions in his teaching and storytelling; and that Thomas's critical thinking and desire to be sure are important aspects of faith, just as they are important in other realms of life. God never asks us to sign onto something glibly.

Why this theme?

Belief isn't something that is above doubt. Kids will have questions—everyone doubts at some point in their life. But this story reminds us that true belief comes from asking questions, that faith is interwoven with doubt and grows from it.

AGE LEVEL TIP

Exploration and investigation are two ways kids learn and grow. Make your classroom a welcoming space for questions and creative wondering. Kids will identify with Thomas, who needed to see with his own eyes to believe—especially something as important as the risen Jesus.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Paper
- Pencils
- Colored pencils
- Pens

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Items for a simple still life (see the Arrive Early activity for ideas)

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Draw by faith rather than by sight. Set up a small, simple still life (such as a water glass with a bunch of pencils in it, or a stuffed animal). As kids arrive, give each a sheet of blank paper and a pencil. Have them look at the still life and draw what they see without looking at the paper.

Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

Have you ever been told something so unbelievable that you couldn't believe it to be true? **Who told you the news?** Give kids time to discuss how they know when to trust and believe seemingly unbelievable things. **Now let's turn the tables. Have you ever not been believed when you've had amazing news? How did you react? Were you open to answering questions?** **When it comes to the Bible, there are many events that can be hard to understand how they literally happened. Jesus' resurrection is one of those stories. It was hard for the disciples, and it's hard for us. But Jesus wasn't angry about the questions. We can wonder and ask questions even as we believe.**

Pray together: **Risen Jesus, open our eyes and our hearts to believe the astounding news of your death-defying love. Give us the courage to ask questions even as we believe. Amen.**

Pass out leaflets and pens.

We know some things are true because we can see them with our own eyes. We trust other things are true even if we can't see them. And we have questions about some things because we can't see them and don't know or trust they are true. **Think about something you know for sure to be true, something you trust to be true, and something you wonder about. Write an example of each on the leaflet.** Give kids time to write, and when they have finished, ask for volunteers to share what they wrote. **How do you believe things without seeing that they are true?**



Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

The Whirl kids are playing a game when they learn something about Leo that makes them upset. **Let's watch what happens when everybody names their favorite disciple.**

View Episode 8, "Scary Queries," on the Year Gold Spring Grades 3–6 DVD.

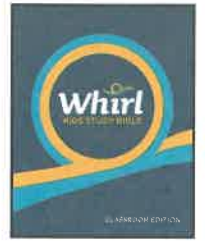
Ask kids these questions about the video:

- Which disciple does Leo say is his favorite?
- Why does Gabe want Leo to pick Philip?
- Which of the twelve disciples is your favorite? Why?
- Why do you think the kids are upset that Leo has questions about the Bible?
- Name one or two questions you have about the Bible, Jesus, or your faith.



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is from the book of John. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. If this is your first time reading from John, invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1270.



For 2,000 years, Thomas has been cast as a doubter. But that's not really fair. Before the events of today's story, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to Mary Magdalene. Jesus sent her to tell the others. But it's likely that she wasn't believed by any of the disciples because at the beginning of the passage, the scared disciples are huddling in a locked room.

Help kids find John 20:19-31 and read it in this creative way together: Ask one person to leave the room while the others listen carefully to the reading. After the reading, explain to the group that they're going to pretend to be the disciples, and the person who left the room is Thomas. Call the person back in. Kids excitedly explain what happened in verses 19-23 without referencing the story. Ask "Thomas" how he feels about what he's hearing and how he'll respond. Then read together verses 24-29.

Invite kids to check out what Gabe says about John 20:24-25.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **What did Jesus do first when he appeared to the disciples?**
- **Why do you think Jesus breathed on them?**
- **What did Thomas say when his friends told him about Jesus appearing?**
- **Why do you think Jesus invites Thomas to touch him?**
- **Who are the ones who "have not seen and yet have come to believe"?**

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Believe*. To remind us of Thomas, who needed to ask questions and see and touch Jesus to believe, let's draw a pair of hands, each with the mark of a wound as Jesus would have had after being crucified, in the box by *Believe*. Invite one or more kids to draw on the chart.



BIBLE BIT

The Gospel of John uses a broader definition of *disciple* than the Twelve. The room in this story may have been filled with many followers of Jesus.

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, have kids consider how Mimi, Ruby, and Gabe could have engaged Leo, as Jesus engaged Thomas, instead of walking out on him.

OUR CHURCH

Jesus appreciated Thomas's honesty. Where in your church is a comfortable place to ask questions?

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out pens.

Tear off leaflet square.

1. **Thomas often gets a bad rap as a skeptic who didn't believe what his friends told him about Jesus. He's actually a good example of someone who asks questions and recognizes Jesus' true divine nature—an insightful hero who wonders with words, looks for answers, and believes in faith. Skeptics are never satisfied, but in our story, Thomas's wonder is met by Jesus himself! In questioning, we learn to live fully and faithfully.**
2. **Thomas had doubts about what he heard—and he turned them into a search for answers. This kind of search starts with questions.**
3. Ask kids to look at the page, with its illustrations and statements. As a group, read together the sentences that surround Thomas *outside* the *who, what, when, where, and why* starbursts.
4. Individually or as a group, brainstorm some *who, what, when, where, and why* questions that are prompted by the statements on the page.
5. Working alone or in pairs, challenge kids to write their own questions and fill in the starbursts.
6. **Where will you try to find answers for your questions? Who can help? What happens if you're not satisfied with an answer you find?**

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Sometimes we don't know what to believe—or how to believe it. Some things, like Jesus returning from the dead, can seem too good to be true. We can wonder and still trust the good news of God's love and grace. Jesus showed up for Thomas, and he shows up for us. God loves our questions because God loves us!

Return to the leaflet panels and pass out pens and colored pencils.

We can experience Jesus through other people. Pass your leaflet panel one person to the left. By the branches of the tree, write one way you can see Jesus is part of the life of this leaflet's owner (such as how you see them using God-given gifts). By the roots, write one way you know Jesus is part of their life even though you can't see it (such as Jesus' gift of peace for everyone). When you've finished, pass the leaflet back and decorate the tree on your leaflet with flowers and fruit.

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.