The Detectives

Is Jesus real? Is there any historical evidence that proves he was real? Isn't he just someone from the past? Is he really God? What's the evidence?

Join us on our investigation as we look at these issues.

Note: This session is designed for Years 6-9 more than perhaps older ages but feel free to use and adapt! We used this on a church weekend away over two half hour sessions (that also included a couple of games). You will probably want to move through the evidence fairly quickly to keep their attention, but you know your group so design it with them in mind, not just what we did!

This session has mainly come from Jon C and Dave B, so massive thanks to them!!

Download

This session comes with a large amount of material for you to download (in a single zip folder, double click to extract if it doesn't automatically). This includes:

- Notes for the session
- An 'Evidence Room' sign
- The 'SOLID' (Secret Organisation of Living International Detectives') logo as a .png file
- A 'scroll' for you to use as a template if you want to add any more evidence
- Logo sheet (these are to be printed off and then put inside lanyard wallets, with lanyards)
- New Testament evidence material

- Historical evidence material
- Eyewitness testimonies sheet (you will need to find five willing volunteers to act the parts, get a photo of them and then insert the photos into the PDF sheet).
- You will also need to ‘arm’ each person acting out a Biblical character with their ‘character-explanation’ PDF, explaining who they are and what they’re to tell the young people.

Click here to download the PDF materials

Kit list:

- Evidence board (white paper)
- Marker Pens
- Post it notes
- Blue tack
- String (to tie pieces of evidence together, like a ‘trail’)
- Newspapers

Overview: Who is Jesus – a Detective Mystery

We’ll be looking at three main areas:

- Historical
- Theological (Biblical)
- Personal (testimony & invitation)

The idea is that the young people will act as detectives, discovering and piecing together the clues. As a leader, you will act to guide them through the process.

Set up the room as an Evidence Room.



As stated above, get some display boards like in police / air investigation type TV programmes. The idea is to pin up lots of physical evidence on the board – using pins or tape etc. Alternatively, you can stand a couple of those fold-up tables on their side and put up a load of white paper over them.

This will end up covered by A4 sheets, so you'll need around 2 metres of space height and width.

Part One – Who is Jesus?

Treasure Hunt: in this, try to find somewhere with a date inscribed eg. in a church building, a grave etc. Alternatively, just use a calendar.

1. Calendar (BC / AD 2024, from what??) The point here is that we have ‘2024’ but 2024 from what? From the birth of Jesus. AD is before the birth of Jesus. (I realise people also use ‘CE’ for ‘common era’ but talk about BC and AD instead).

2. What about the weekend? Sunday = 1st day of the week. Why? Because of Jesus.

3. Now think about some ‘cultural norms & mannerisms’, so the things people do in every day life that can be traced back to Jesus. For example: people crossing themselves; saying thank you (the word in many languages comes from ‘grace’, for example ‘gracias’). What about when people say ‘touch wood’? This comes from the wooden cross. Or swear words – people don’t say ‘Mohammed’ or ‘Buddha’ but they do so ‘Oh God’ or ‘Jesus Christ’. Any others you can think of?

4. Newspaper illustrations. Get a bunch of newspapers with them all having a single story (eg about the King). Remember to remove any dodgy newspaper pages (!) and then give the group the newspapers. The key is that all the papers have the same story and yet they are all different papers, using different authors. The point is that with the New Testament we have thousands of independent examples that are accurate to each other, showing the truth of what is written.

   –> **Use the ‘historical-NT-evidence’ PDF** here, showing ancient New Testament documents. These contain six pages of photos of three original scrolls. The first three pages have extra evidence. The second three pages show just the originals – we made these sheets look old by using tea stains / putting under the grill / using a lighter to burn the edges. Pin these up on the board one by one as you go through them.

Next, use the historical evidence: this talks about Jesus e.g. Josephus (many of these were hostile towards Jesus so had no reason to lie about him).

–> **For this, use the ‘historical-refs-to-jesus’ PDF**. Get them pinned up on the board.

Goal of session

To arrive at the conclusion that Jesus is a real; an actual historic person.

Evidence Sheets

–> **For this, use the ‘evidence-sheets’ PDF**

Finally, arm the young people with the ‘eyewitness sheets’ and send them off to find the eyewitnesses of Jesus. Get people in the youth team or church to play these characters. See the notes above about prepping people in the church and having their photos in advance.

Here are the characters we chose and their summarised stories:

- Lazarus (He raised me from the dead). Power over Death.
- Blind Man (He healed my eyes). Authority over sickness.
- Peter (I saw him walk on water, calm storm, turn water into wine.) He is God, He is Christ.
- Mary and Mary (We saw him alive not in the tomb). Jesus was raised from the Dead.

The young people should bring these sheets back for Session 2.

Session 2 – Bringing the eyewitness evidence together

Key Point: To use all the evidence, especially the eyewitness testimonies to ask what this tells us about Jesus?

Say that these are the testimonies of people who were in the Bible. But what about today? Are there any stories of people who have had their lives changed by Jesus?

Personal Accounts

Select two people in church to give their testimonies

These volunteers need to nee able to relate to young people and quickly summarise their stories (max of 5 mins each). Get the young people to ask them the same questions that are on the 'evidence sheets':

- How do you know Jesus?
- What happened to you?
- Who do you think Jesus is?

The final thing to do is to ask the young people who they think Jesus is. Get them to write something down on a post-it note and then collect them up and put out on the wall / or get the young people to put it on the evidence board themselves. You may or may not decide to read out some of the responses.

Finally get everyone to close their eyes and tell them that if they want to they can pray this prayer in their hearts (not out loud) and then chat with you or other leaders if they want to after.

"Jesus, I believe you are real and that you are God. I ask you to come into my life and change me to be like you. I'm sorry for the long things I have done and I want to turn from them. Fill me with your Holy Spirit now. I want to follow you and live my life for you. Amen."