

THE BIBLE TIMELINE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL ENCOUNTER



Semester Plan

Encounter is a versatile Scripture study resource that can be taught in as few as eight lessons or serve as the main text and content resource for a full semester course. This guide is designed to help teachers in a Catholic school setting implement *Encounter* over the course of 18 weeks.

We understand that school schedules vary. It is a common experience that religious formation takes place multiple times each school week—but some religion teachers meet with students each day while others at the middle school level meet two to three times a week on rotating schedules. We also know that schools often schedule other types of formation and events that take place during the religion class, which can make lesson planning a bit tricky. (We’ve been there. We get it!)

This document is designed to help you with your lesson planning by laying out priorities and features to implement over the course of a typical semester. There may not be a “one size fits all” solution, but our aim is to offer several suggestions, principles, and practices that we believe can be universally helpful to teachers as they plan.

Encounter offers many resources for learning, processing, application, reflection, and prayer that, if properly implemented, can ensure a rich learning experience over the course of a semester. We strive to equip you, the educator, with great tools to support you in achieving that end. Thank you for your yes to the ministry of teaching, and know that we are praying for you.

TIPS, PRINCIPLES, AND PRACTICES

- 1. Have students practice engaging with Scripture directly.** This takes time during each lesson, but building this habit can have a lifelong impact on students.
 - a. Have students engage with their Bibles during each lesson.
 - b. Get into the habit of having them find passages during sessions. This practice can build long-term scriptural literacy and fluency. (Consider replicating the “Bible Race” activity from Lesson One during each session, whether by using different passages relevant to the lesson that you are on or even by literally repeating the activity several times so that students build “muscle memory.” This can be a great bell-ringer activity at the start of each class.)
 - c. Ensure that you take time to find and directly engage with the relevant Scripture references throughout the program.
- 2. Take advantage of all the suggested activities in each lesson.** Teaching *Encounter* over the course of a semester means having time to engage in *Lectio Divina*, work through discussion questions, and follow up in the moment with features like “Live it Out” to ensure that students are integrating what they learn into their lived experience. Teaching the program over the course of a semester gives you ample opportunity to review and assess learning from session to session.
- 3. Don’t just “cover it.”** Encounter offers award-winning videos and leads students through a proven method of biblical study that can deepen the context for lifelong Scripture reading. As amazing as the videos and text are, the classroom experience is where connection, engagement, repetition, check-ins for understanding, and sharing of life experiences happen. Take time to ensure that the students do more than watch great videos and read engaging text. Ensure that they are given a chance to connect with the Scripture and with one another using the provided prompts and activities.
- 4. Teach the time periods through the weekly readings.** Consider using the last class meeting of the week to preview the upcoming Sunday readings. These are available each week on the Ascension app and on the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (usccb.org). This practice will help students engage with Scripture through the Church’s liturgy and will connect what they are learning to the lived experience of the Mass.
 1. Open with the prayer for the lesson that you are studying that week.
 2. Access the Sunday readings through the Ascension app or usccb.org. Project them, make copies, or have students digitally access them.

3. Take the readings one at a time:
 - a. Have a student read the text aloud (coach them through any challenging words).
 - b. Have students identify to which of the TGA time periods the reading belongs.
 - c. Ask students to summarize the story or teaching in the reading.
 - d. Ask the students to share how the reading connects with them. What stands out? What do they think God is saying to them through the reading?
 - e. When you study the Gospel, ask the students whether they see any connection to the first reading. (Hint: this is most often quite intentional. Look yourself and note any connections between the two readings.)
4. Invite students to participate more deeply in the Mass for the upcoming weekend since they are now prepared to engage with the readings.
5. **Set steps for each lesson spread over two weeks.** Using *Encounter* to cover an entire semester will mean adjusting the steps to account for a lesson being taught over the course of two weeks. When it comes to content, we recommend teaching one day and then reviewing and assessing during the next. Below is a sample template for teaching one lesson over the course of two weeks. (Again, this is a suggested template, and we know that this may not match your exact situation, but our hope is that this example will guide you in planning for your own unique setting.)

This sample accounts for a schedule that would spread a lesson over six classes:

CLASS 1

Focus on the initial steps and features and make these the goals of the session.

- a. Pray together.
- b. Spark interest and connection.
- c. Introduce the time period.
- d. Set goals and expectations leading up to the test/assessment at the end of the lesson

CLASS 2

Move toward the heart of the content by centering this lesson on the “Dive In” features of the lesson. Have students read, view the videos, and engage with feedback. Be sure to review and informally assess that students have learned about the time period and have retained the learning from the previous class.

- a. Pray together.
- b. Check in with students and review the content introduced in the previous class.
- c. Show the “Dive In” video.
- d. Follow up with the “Dive In” text, “Got It?” review, and “Dive In” activity.

CLASS 3

This plan could be repeated during the last meeting of the week each week as time allows. This is an application of point #4 of this guide (p. XX.)

Consider taking the last meeting of this first week to tie the timeline into the Liturgy. Prepare your class for the upcoming Sunday readings. The readings, of course, may not relate directly to the timeline period you are studying—but as a repeated practice throughout the program, students will begin to see how the readings at each Sunday Mass are aligned. Here are some ideas:

- a. Situate the readings in time periods.
- b. Have students look up and engage with the readings.
- c. Facilitate a conversation about the readings. Here are some proposed questions:
 - i. What is one word or phrase that jumps out at you from these readings?
 - ii. What do you think God is saying to you in these readings?
 - iii. What questions do these readings bring up for you?
 - iv. Is there someone in these readings whom you relate to?

CLASS 4

Focus on the Biblical Character Profile in the text. While this content could be explored in as little as 15 minutes, it can also expand into a whole session if time is taken to read the scriptural account that the biblical character profile is based on.

- a. Pray together.
- b. Review the “Dive In” content and check in on the students’ experience at Sunday Mass.
- c. Present the Biblical Character Video.
- d. Read the Biblical Character Profile and lead students through the exercise.

CLASS 5

Offer a comprehensive review to prepare students for the test or assessment at the end of the lesson.

- a. Pray together.
- b. Lead students through the “Find Out More” and “Living It Out” text.
- c. Review the main points of the lesson. Go back through questions and activities to reinforce learning and connections.
 - i. Make sure that students understand what and how to study. Consider running a review game.

CLASS 6

- a. Pray together.
- b. Administer assessment.
- c. Once students have completed the assessment, go over the answers together.
- d. Optional: Prepare students for the upcoming Sunday readings (consider an abbreviated version of Class 3).

6. **Finally, keep it real and relevant.** *Encounter* was developed with the pastoral and relational needs of middle schoolers in mind. In a school setting, there needs to be measurable academic learning, but it is important to integrate that academic component with spiritual, pastoral, and human growth. Teachers in a Catholic school setting have a unique opportunity to invest in students and accompany them over an extended period. We believe that the content of this program is highly conducive to effective ministry and teaching.

If you have any questions about this program, please contact us—we would love to hear from you!

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