

Winner of the First Place Award in 2016 in the "Best Children's Books" category by the Catholic Press Association, this already is about what happens when a daughter asks her father, with "her eyes twinkling with this divine little twist," to tell her a story about when God was a little girl"...and he obliges by retelling the story of creation as if God had been a seven year old girl "who liked art projects."

Questions for Reflection and Discussion for "When God Was a Little Girl"

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Questions for young children:

1. What did you like best about the book? Why?
2. Did anything in the book surprise you? Do you have any questions about it?
3. Which picture of the little girl Susanna was your favorite? Why do you think the artist drew her to look like different girls?
4. Do you like to make up stories, or would you rather read them in books? What is your favorite story of all time?
5. Do you think God could act like a little girl? Why or why not?
6. What do you think of the kind of world God created in the book? How is it the same or different from your world?
7. When all the girls got together near the end, why did they say "This is good"? Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?
8. Why do you think God said, "I'm not done singing yet!" When do you feel like singing?
9. God said, "This is how you become friends with everything in the Garden. See, it's a great big Song. When you name each Animal—and the Plants too—you can hear how all the notes fit together." Can you hear that song sometimes? When?
10. If you wanted to make up a different story with someone, what would you want it to be about? Why?

Questions for adults:

1. What did you think when you first heard the title of this book? What do you think now after you have read it yourself or read it to a child?
2. Do you think that boys and girls should react differently to this book? Explain.
3. What is the role of storytelling in the Bible? Do you think it is a good idea to retell Bible stories in different language or images? Why or why not?
4. Jesus was a male. He referred to God as his "Father." He also referred to God as the "Holy Spirit," with no indication of gender. Do you think it is helpful to sometimes refer to the feminine side of God? Why or why not?
5. What is a metaphor? Are metaphors useful in helping children understand religion and spirituality? Give some examples from your own experience.
6. What is the essence of the story of creation? In your opinion, does this story capture that essence? Why or why not?

7. If you are telling children a story, how do you try to make it enjoyable and understandable? Give an example.
8. What other children's books have you read to children that have a similar effect to "When God Was a Little Girl"? Describe that reaction.
9. Do you think the artist's decision to change the race/ethnicity of the little girl on each page worked? Why or why not?
10. If you were to recommend this book to someone else to read to a child, what would you tell them?

Questions for reflection and discussion with older youth

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1. Name one thing in the text of the story that stood out for you. Name one thing about the illustrations that stood out for you.
2. How do *you* imagine God? (What does God "look" like in your imagination?) Who or what influences the way you imagine God? In what ways has your image been helpful ... or limiting ... to you or to others?
3. How did the image of God as female—and a little girl—and across many cultures—strike you? As exciting, intriguing, silly, weird, irreverent, threatening, empowering—or all of them at once? What do you think accounts for your reaction?
4. Biblical scholars consider the biblical creation stories as "myth"—not "false," but holding truth that runs deeper than historical or scientific fact. They offer meaning. Looking at this story as "myth," what meanings can you hear? (The following questions can help unpack this further.)
5. What emotions and values does our society usually assign to darkness? What difference does it make that in this story Susanna declares that Love was the color of darkness?
6. Most English translations of Genesis 2:7 tell us, "God fashioned a man (Hebrew: *adam*) from the dust of ground (Hebrew: *adamah*), erasing a wordplay that ties us deeply back to the dirt beneath our feet. Given the ecological challenges facing us today, does it matter that (to children or to adults) this story reclaims that wordplay, calling us Humus Beings, made from humus?
7. Like many creation accounts around the world, the biblical account begins with just two original beings. The rest of us are taller/shorter, thinner/stockier, lighter/darker than the first two who, we assume, must reflect God's ideals most of all. Today tensions around race and pressures around body image reflect our own prejudices about what is "ideal." What difference does it make that here God creates "bunches" of humus beings—of all shapes, sizes, skin tones—and calls them all "very good"?
8. We are often taught to see ourselves at the top of creation's pyramid, permitted to use (even to exploit) our fellow creatures. How does it feel to hear the story suggest that our goal is to "become friends" with creation?
9. In the final exchange between David and Susanna, he suggests we are *imago Dei* (in the image of God) when we become "Echoes of God's love," and not simply to God, but to one another and to creation. How does this match, deepen, or challenge the way you think about being *imago Dei*? How does it speak to the needs of our world today?
10. Although written for children, many adults find the book very meaningful. The back cover of the book calls it a "whimsically profound tale," offering "gentle wisdom and genuine insight." It even ventures to say, "You may never think about God, creation, or yourself in quite the same way." The author and the illustrator *hope* this is true for both children and adults. How has it proven true for you?

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