

MY UNIVERSE STORY

draft curriculum by [Connie Barlow](#) • Connie@TheGreatStory.org

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- Full school-year (less holidays) weekly curriculum, ideally for **3rd – 4th grade**
- For **liberal religious education, freethinking families, Montessori and private schools**

SUMMARY: Over the course of **32 weeks** (fewer if some of the 28 beads sessions are combined; more if suggested extra sessions for **drama** are used—*see p. 7*), children learn about the major events, in chronological order, of the full story of the Universe, as best understood by science. **28 major events** have been chosen, relevant to a child’s experience and interests. Most events interconnect in some way, such that the narrative builds from week to week. Each event will be represented by a **bead**, with one bead acquired each week, culminating in each child stringing all 28 of their beads into a **loop or necklace** to take home. A typical session includes (1) Review of prior week; (2) Newcomer catch-up time; (3) Interactive Storytelling/Discussion; (4) Movement Activity related to the story element; (5) Choosing the EVENT BEAD; (6) Taping bead to Storyboard; (7) Crafts Activity.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To provision our children with a deep sense that they are **children of the Universe**, and that the Universe Story is *their* story, their largest story of all.
2. To give children a sense that everything they learn about the **natural world** is also part of their “religious” understanding; everything is “**religio**” — that is, linked together.
3. To help participants **learn their Story**: the major events and the actual sequence. (For this age group, dates are not important; only the *order of events*, which makes a story.)
4. To encourage a sense of **kinship and love** for all life.
5. To offer children the **security and wonder** that they arise from an amazing **ancestry**.
6. To subtly teach liberal **ethical and earth-caring values**.
7. To have children engage in a **long-term crafts project (beads)** that builds every week, that fosters **patience**, and that culminates in a sense of **accomplishment**.
8. To have them take home their **beads necklace/loop** and (hopefully) treasure it for years.
9. To help children understand that a **story based on science** (1) evolves as new discoveries are made, and (2) is based on actual evidence.

1. Great Radiance	2. Galaxies	3. Stars / stardust	4. Sun	5. Earth & planets	6. Earth's moon	7. Rain & oceans
8. Life begins	9. Sea animals	10. Plants on land	11. Amphibians	12. Insects & flight	13. Trees / wood	14. Dinosaurs
15. Reptiles in Sea	16. Meteor/Extinct	17. Turtles	18. Little mammals	19. Primates	20. Grass	21. First humans
22. Ice Age / fire	23. Dogs adopted	24. Cats adopted	25. Horses adopted	26. Cities / reading	27. I am born!	28. My future?

MY UNIVERSE STORY

1. **The Great Radiance** (the “Big Bang”) happens, and our Universe is born.
2. **Galaxies** form, and small galaxies merge into bigger galaxies (like our Milky Way).
3. **Stars** begin to squeeze hydrogen gas into helium, then carbon and calcium and more.
4. **Our Sun** is born after ancestor stars explode and enrich the galaxy with stardust atoms.
5. **Earth** and the other planets form from stardust that swirls into ever bigger clumps.
6. **Earth’s moon** is born when a giant meteor splatters a big chunk of Earth into orbit.
7. **Rain** falls for the first time when Earth cools; then the rain gathers into **oceans**.
8. **Life** begins in the ocean when ancestors of bacteria find ways to eat stardust.
9. **Animals** such as sponges and jellyfish (and, later, clams and fish) evolve in the oceans.
10. **Plants** begin to grow on land when algae (seaweed) evolves ways to survive in dry air.
11. **Amphibians** (like salamanders) evolve from fish who learned to crawl and breathe air.
12. **Insects** evolve wings and become the first animals to fly.
13. **Trees** grow tall when plants discover how to fill their stems with sturdy cells of wood.
14. **Dinosaurs** evolve and some grow long necks to eat leaves high up in trees.
15. **Reptiles** return to the sea and become mosasaurs, plesiosaurs, and ichthyosaurs.
16. **A giant meteor** strikes Earth; dinosaurs, ammonites, and marine reptiles go extinct.
17. **Turtles** survive the meteor by sleeping in mud; then comes The Golden Age of Turtles.
18. **Little mammals** survive the meteor in burrows; then they diversify into many kinds.
19. **Primates** live in the trees and evolve fingers and toes to hold onto branches.
20. **Grasses** evolve underground stems so that cows (and lawnmowers) can’t hurt them.
21. **Humans** evolve when primates in Africa learn how to walk on grasslands and to talk.
22. **The Ice Age** begins, and humans learn how to make **fire** to cook food and keep warm.
23. **Dogs** are adopted by humans to help them track down animals to hunt.
24. **Cats** are adopted by farmers who need to keep mice and rats away from stored grain.
25. **Horses** are adopted by humans to give us a ride, haul heavy things, and plow fields.
26. **Humans** learn to cooperate in bigger and bigger cities and we learn how to read.
27. **You are born** and now you are learning our story of all that came before you.
28. **What will my future be?** And what role will I play in this Universe Story?

*Note: Events in **red** would be suitable for kids making their own bead from sculpey clay.*

- **Obtaining Beads - *Do this well in advance***

Recruit a women's crafts group, or ask crafts women to form such a group, to use the list of 28 events as a guide for selecting and purchasing beads at a local beads store. Give them a budget to work with, and ask them to put on a fundraising event if they need more money. Also, decide in advance **which (if any) beads you might want to have the children create themselves**, using **sculpey clay**: http://thegreatstory.org/make_beads.html *(Note: Beads made of sculpey clay are heavier and larger than the rest, so choose no more than 4 to 6 events to be sculpey clay beads, and best if there are no appendages that might break off easily. The events in RED in the 28-event list would be good as sculpey beads, and the author of this curriculum built in class time for making those beads in those 5 sessions.)*

See [TheGreatStory.org BEADS page](#) on selecting beads and appropriate beading string, and this page for using **sculpey clay**: http://thegreatstory.org/make_beads.html#sculpey

- **The list of 28 events**

Make plenty of copies of the list of the **B&W** version of the 28 events list (immediately below), as you will be passing out copies at your **second class session** for the kids to take home, and additional copies will be used during every class session. It is also a good way for kids and parents to see what **EVENT** they will miss if they skip a class session, and to bring children new to the class rapidly up to speed.

- **Storyboard with the 28-square matrix**

At **Session 2**, each child will glue the matrix to a slightly larger stiff piece of **posterboard** or **recycled cereal box**. Each session thereafter, every child will gain 1 (or 2) additional beads and will tape them to the appropriate square on the Storyboard. This Matrix will be kept in a **Storyboard Storage Box** between sessions, until the final sessions when the beads are strung together and children take home their **Universe Story beads**.

- **Great for newcomers and missed classes**

Children who missed a previous session can easily catch up by filling in the missed squares with beads designated for previous times. Students who begin attending weeks after the program starts may easily catch up just by reading the list of events they missed, selecting beads, and taping those beads onto the matrix.

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4. **Our Sun** is born after ancestor stars explode and enrich the galaxy with stardust atoms.
5. **Earth** and the other planets form from stardust that swirls into ever bigger clumps.
6. **Earth’s moon** is born when a giant meteor splatters a big chunk of Earth into orbit.
7. **Rain** falls for the first time when Earth cools; then the rain gathers into **oceans**.
8. **Life** begins in the ocean when ancestors of bacteria find ways to eat stardust.
9. **Animals** such as sponges and jellyfish (and, later, clams and fish) evolve in the oceans.
10. **Plants** begin to grow on land when algae (seaweed) evolves ways to survive in dry air.
11. **Amphibians** (like salamanders) evolve from fish who learned to crawl and breathe air.
12. **Insects** evolve wings and become the first animals to fly.
13. **Trees** grow tall when plants discover how to fill their stems with sturdy cells of wood.
14. **Dinosaurs** evolve and some grow long necks to eat leaves high up in trees.
15. **Reptiles** return to the sea and become mosasaurs, plesiosaurs, and ichthyosaurs.
16. **A giant meteor** strikes Earth; dinosaurs, ammonites, and marine reptiles go extinct.
17. **Turtles** survive the meteor by sleeping in mud; then comes The Golden Age of Turtles.
18. **Little mammals** survive the meteor in burrows; then they diversify into many kinds.
19. **Primates** live in the trees and evolve fingers and toes to hold onto branches.
20. **Grasses** evolve underground stems so that cows (and lawnmowers) can’t hurt them.
21. **Humans** evolve when primates in Africa learn how to walk on grasslands and to talk.
22. **The Ice Age** begins, and humans learn how to make **fire** to cook food and keep warm.
23. **Dogs** are adopted by humans to help them track down animals to hunt.
24. **Cats** are adopted by farmers who need to keep mice and rats away from stored grain.
25. **Horses** are adopted by humans to give us a ride, haul heavy things, and plow fields.
26. **Humans** learn to cooperate in bigger and bigger cities and we learn how to read.
27. **You are born** and now you are learning our story of all that came before you.
28. **What will my future be?** And what role will I play in this Universe Story?

CALENDAR OF POSSIBLE EXTRA SESSIONS FOR DRAMA

1. **The Great Radiance** (the “Big Bang”) happens, and our Universe is born.
2. **Galaxies** form, and small galaxies merge into bigger galaxies (like our Milky Way).
3. **Stars** begin to squeeze hydrogen gas into helium, then carbon and calcium and more.
4. **Our Sun** is born after ancestor stars explode and enrich the galaxy with stardust atoms.
4b. Perform Parable: “Startull: The Story of an Average Yellow Star”
and end with “Stardust Glitter Ritual” (“Cosmic Communion”) directions on pp. 41–44
of this pdf: <http://thegreatstory.org/stardust-kids-lessons.pdf>
5. **Earth** and the other planets form from stardust that swirls into ever bigger clumps.
(Includes the play for kids to act out: **“Pluto’s Identity Crisis”**).
6. **Earth’s moon** is born when a giant meteor splatters a big chunk of Earth into orbit.
6b. Required Extra session to finish the **Moon story** and to continue **making an Earth Bead and a Moon Bead from sculpey clay**. This session is required, as the sculpey clay beads-making of the Earth Bead and the Moon Bead took extra time, so catch-up story-telling and finishing beads-making requires an extra class.
7. **Rain** falls for the first time when Earth cools; then the rain gathers into **oceans**.
8. **Life** begins in the ocean when ancestors of bacteria find ways to eat stardust.
9. **Animals** such as sponges and jellyfish (and, later, clams and fish) evolve in the oceans.
10. **Plants** begin to grow on land when algae (seaweed) evolves ways to survive in dry air.
11. **Amphibians** (like salamanders) evolve from fish who learned to crawl and breathe air.
11b. Perform 2 Parables: “The Lucky Little Seaweed” + “Ozzie and the Snortlefish”
12. **Insects** evolve wings and become the first animals to fly.
13. **Trees** grow tall when plants discover how to fill their stems with sturdy cells of wood.
14. **Dinosaurs** evolve and some grow long necks to eat leaves high up in trees.
14b. Invite Youth Group to perform: “Earth Had a Challenging Childhood”
15. **Reptiles** return to the sea and become mosasaurs, plesiosaurs, and ichthyosaurs.
16. **A giant meteor** strikes Earth; dinosaurs, ammonites, and marine reptiles go extinct.
17. **Turtles** survive the meteor by sleeping in mud; then comes The Golden Age of Turtles.
18. **Little mammals** survive the meteor in burrows; then they diversify into many kinds.
19. **Primates** live in the trees and evolve fingers and toes to hold onto branches.
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21. **Humans** evolve when primates in Africa learn how to walk on grasslands and to talk.
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Note: The bead weeks are preceded by 1 week of Introduction and followed by 2 weeks of stringing the beads. Bead 6 requires 2 weeks for completion. This yields a total of **32 weeks** — if no extra sessions for drama or make-up are added.

● A Note to Teachers on the INTERACTIVE TEACHING MODEL

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY: The author of this curriculum, **Connie Barlow**, was a professional science writer of adult books on evolution. Her four books (and many essays) were published between 1991 and 2001. In 2002, she and her husband Michael Dowd launched an itinerant ministry of evolutionary evangelism. Connie still does research and presents multi-media programs on evolutionary themes to adults, but her core concern is producing curricula that can bring the evolutionary story to life for children in liberal religious education settings, family homeschooling, and private schools. She regularly tests her ideas in children's religious education settings and Montessori classrooms while on the road.

Access online [Connie's PUBLICATION LIST](#).

Access online [Connie's LIST OF CHILDREN'S CURRICULA](#).

This particular curriculum is **content-rich**. Few teacher/facilitators will already know even half the science content as they prepare to teach this course. Thus, **most of you will be learning** along with the kids. Children (more than adults, it seems!) are fascinated with science/nature facts. For example, many kids on their own will establish a practice of memorizing the long scientific names of dinosaurs. Teachers should recognize that, in most classroom situations, there will be **at least one child who knows a lot more** about the topics under discussion than you do. So *relax!* **Let those kids shine**. And if an unresolved science question arises, ask for a volunteer or two to research that question outside of class and report back to everyone at the next session.

Connie's personal teaching method as guest teacher in many classrooms over the years is **highly interactive**. Rather than telling or reading a story and then posing questions to the kids to foster discussion, Connie **recruits the kids to help tell the story as it unfolds**. **Inquiry and discussion are thus intermixed with the content teaching**, not reserved for the end. Connie likes to pose questions that invite kids to contribute what they already know—or can figure out, assisted by clues. This curriculum uses that same approach. It is also interactive in another way: There will be kids who regularly volunteer to research science questions that you pose and tell their findings in the next class. Also, some lessons end with an opportunity for children to **interview adults** during the week, and to report their findings the following week. Thus the classroom topics interact with real life.

As teacher/facilitator, you can either read the text and questions exactly as provided. Or you can spend some time reviewing it in advance, making notes to yourself, and then improvise in real time. The format **bolds keywords** to help you look up and not lose your place. Of course, use your judgment as to which of the many **tangents** the kids themselves will surely raise should be followed, and which should be gracefully cut off. Have fun! And please jot notes along the way when you think of ways to improve the lesson plans. Then send these to Connie@TheGreatStory.org or to:

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● Downloading Lesson Plans

All Lesson Plans are in PDF format. Right-click (control+click on a Mac) to download:

TEACHER'S OVERALL GUIDE TO THIS CURRICULUM:

<http://thegreatstory.org/beads-curric.pdf>

A. The first 5 sessions of lessons: <http://thegreatstory.org/beads-curric-1.pdf>

Overview: Introduction to My Universe Story

Bead 1: Great Radiance (Big Bang)

Bead 2: Galaxies (and our own Milky Way)

Bead 3: Stars

Bead 4: Our Sun

B. The next set of lessons: <http://thegreatstory.org/beads-curric-2.pdf>

Bead 5: Earth and the other planets

Bead 6: Earth's Moon

6B: (finishing making beads 5 and 6 and telling Moon's story)

Bead 7: Rain falls / Oceans form

Bead 8: Life begins