

# Numbers - the throw of the dice

## Introduction

Number work is central to the curriculum and the following outline makes use of numbers as a way into a story and then some thoughtful concern for others to use as a time of reflection in the classroom.

## Preparation

You will need at least one large blow-up die, such as those available with some games sold at the Early Learning Centre.

## Development

1. Numbers are all around us in the classroom. Invite the children to spot how many different numbers they can see from where they're sitting.

For example:

In lists, in sums, on pages, as serial numbers on items, as dates, in book titles or on the computer keyboard, etc.

Extend this by asking where they might see numbers outside, in the streets or in their homes. For example: on a house door, at a bus stop, on a car registration plate, as price tags in shops, etc.

Numbers are everywhere and are used in all sorts of ways.

2. Do you have a favourite number? Ask the class for favourite numbers and for reasons, if possible.

3. All our numbers are made up from ten different digits - the first ten numbers including zero. This isn't surprising really, as we have ten fingers and thumbs and so this was a good place to start for human beings when dealing with figures. We begin by counting on our fingers and this can still be helpful sometimes.

Play a quick number challenge by calling out any number between one and ten and asking the children to put up the right number of fingers and thumbs to represent that number. Make this as rapid as is possible!

4. Throughout history some numbers have come to be linked with special meanings.

For example:

**One:** usually stands for the top or the best of a group; in some cultures it represents the sun or it is the number linked to God.

**Two:** is linked to the idea of special friendships; or in some cultures to the moon - the second biggest object visible in the sky.

**Three:** is thought by many to be a sacred number, with a beginning, middle and an end all of its own; good things are said to come in threes; the Christian idea of God has three parts - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; saying things in threes is often recommended as the way to catch people's attention when giving a talk; there are three dimensions which we can see.

**Four:** is the number of elements recognized by ancient peoples, namely earth, air, fire and water; in the past when people thought that the earth was flat they talked of the four corners of the earth and we still use that expression; there are of course four points to the compass.

**Five:** is the number of digits we have on each hand and foot; it is linked to the five senses.

**Six:** is the number of 'days' it took God to create the earth. Snowflakes and honeycombs are six-sided.

**You might like to try the following trick sum with older children. It will always give the answer 6!**

**Think of any whole number between 1 and 9 (for example 8). Multiply it by 3 ( $8 \times 3 = 24$ ). Take this number and its two numbers below it in value (in our example 24, 23 and 22) and add them all up ( $24 + 23 + 22 = 69$ ). Whatever the sum is, add up the numbers in that sum up and keep on doing this until you end up with just one number left ( $6 + 9 = 15$ ,  $1 + 5 = 6$ ). It will always be 6!**

**Seven:** many regard this as a particularly special number. It is linked to the day that God rested after creation. It often stands for heaven itself and is therefore mysterious and even magical. It is also a lucky number. In Japan for example, at 7 minutes past 7 on the 7th day of the 7th month in the 7th year of an emperor, 7 runners run 7,777 metres around the imperial palace - all because it is bound to bring good luck. Psychologists also say that we can remember no more than seven things at a time!

**Eight:** is a special number in the Buddhist tradition with the eightfold path; in Christian teaching with the 8 beatitudes; and in Islam with 8 paradises.

**Nine:** is a popular number for listing special people or events. A cat is said to have 9 lives and if someone is very happy, he or she said to be 'on cloud nine'.

5. In one of the stories about Jesus some interesting number work seems to be going on. Put up the following strange sum:

5 2 divided by 5,000 = 12!

This is a number way of describing the story of how Jesus fed 5000 with just 5 loaves and 2 small fish with the result of 12 baskets full leftover.

Tell the story which can be found in John 6:1-13:

Jesus crossed Lake Galilee, which was also known as Lake Tiberias. A large crowd had seen him perform miracles and heal the sick and those people went with him. It was almost time for the Jewish festival of Passover and Jesus went up on a mountain with his disciples and sat down. When Jesus saw a large crowd coming towards him, he asked Philip, 'Where will we get enough food to feed all these people?' He said this to test them, since he already knew what he was going to do. Philip answered, 'Don't you know that it would take almost a year's wages just to buy a little bread for each of these people?'

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the disciples. He spoke up and said, 'There is a boy here who has five small loaves of barley bread and two fish. But what good is that with all these people?'

The ground was covered with grass and Jesus told his disciples to make everyone sit down. About 5000 men were in the crowd. Jesus took the bread in his hands and gave thanks to God. Then he passed the bread to the people and he did the same with the fish, until everyone had plenty to eat.

The people ate all they wanted, and Jesus told his disciples to gather up the leftovers, so that nothing would be wasted. The disciples gathered them up and filled twelve large baskets with what was left over from the five barley loaves.

*I wonder what the disciples felt when they saw the crowds coming?*

*I wonder why Andrew noticed the boy with his loaves and fish?*

*I wonder what the boy felt like when Jesus used his loaves and fish to feed so many people?*

*I wonder if these numbers are special in any way?*

*I wonder what Jesus' friends learned from what happened?*

*I wonder how the young boy explained to his family what had happened to their packed lunch!*

In God's hands numbers can take on even stranger significance, it seems!

6. We also use numbers to play games.

Bring out the large blow-up die.

For our time of quiet today we will use some of the numbers on the die, as they turn up, to help us think about other people.

Ask some of the children to throw the die two or three times and, depending on which numbers turn up, use those numbers as a way into some quiet prayer and reflection according to the ideas below. If the same number comes up more than once just ask for re-throw. Alternatively, you could use two dice and use the different numbers to be the focus for that day's reflection.

Hear some suggestions for the meaning to the numbers:

**Number 1:** think about one thing you want to say a big 'thank you' for today.

Or: Think about someone who is on his or her own today and of what you can do to help.

**Number 2:** think about your best friend and ask God to keep him or her safe today

Or: Think about two of the people who care for you, perhaps a parent and a grandparent. Ask God to keep them safe today.

**Number 3:** think about some of your other relatives, maybe brothers, sisters or cousins and ask God to keep them safe this day.

Or: because three reminds us about God being Father Son and Holy Spirit, ask that that you might learn more about God today.

**Number 4:** arranged as a square, this looks like a building, so think about your school and ask that it will be a safe and happy place today.

Or: the four points are like the four points of the compass, so think about those who are travelling off in different directions today - someone from school or among your family and friends.

**Number 5:** this shape, with four outside and one in the middle, can remind us about our school in the middle of our community. Think about the shops, houses and the work places around the school and ask God to keep people safe in their jobs today

**Number 6:** this number reminds us of the whole world with its more than 6 billion people on 6 continents! Think about those far away from here in other countries, especially those facing hard times and difficult circumstances.

7. Finish your time of number reflection with a simple prayer based on words from Jesus who said that God is so great that he knows about every single sparrow that falls.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you that even among so great number of people in this world, you see us and care about each one of us.*

*Help us to remember that each of us is important to you and so help us to treat others today in the same way, as special and not just as a number.*

*Amen*

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