Jesus and the Twelve

Background
The word apostle is a transliteration of the Greek word apostos. While the term apostle suggests one who is sent out to proclaim the faith, a disciple is a student of a religious leader. The twelve, then, were disciples of Jesus while Jesus was alive on earth. When he sent them out to carry on his mission, they became apostles.

There are four lists of apostles in the New Testament, found in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13. The four lists give contradictory names for the Twelve. We use the traditional names for the Twelve. We discuss eleven apostles; Judas, the twelfth, removed himself from the Twelve through his suicide and betrayal. Matthias replaced Judas after Jesus’ ascension into heaven.

Da Vinci’s famous painting The Last Supper provides the background for our exploration. It depicts the reaction of the disciples to Christ’s statement, “One of you will betray me.” Christ has one palm turned down, as if to say, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” The other palm is turned up, as if to say, “Not my will but thine be done.” The painting was painted about the time Columbus discovered America. The people in the painting are dressed the way wealthy people in northern Italy in the 15th century would have dressed.

Material
The basket for Jesus and the Twelve is on one of the New Testament shelves.
It contains:

- reproduction of Da Vinci’s Last Supper painting
- small box containing 12 shields with symbols
  - Andrew - white X-shaped cross on blue background
  - Bartholomew - three knives
  - James (son of Zebedee) - three scallop shells and a sword
  - James the Less (son of Alphaeus) - saw
  - John - cup and serpent
  - Jude - sailboat
  - Matthew - three money bags
  - Phillip - cross with two loaves of bread
  - Thomas - builder’s square and spear
  - Simon Peter - upside-down cross and crossed keys
  - Simon the Zealot - book and fish
  - Matthias - sword and book
**Movements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walk slowly to the shelf and pick up the basket with the materials for Jesus and the Twelve. Carry it carefully to the circle and set the basket beside you. Place the painting in the center of the circle, facing the children. Sit quietly while you feel the story forming in you.</td>
<td>Watch where I go so you will always know where to find this lesson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweep your hand over the picture as you name the Twelve.</td>
<td>When Jesus went to Jerusalem for the last time, he went with the Twelve. They were his special friends. Today we call them the apostles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point to some of the bread and wine on the table in the painting when you name them.</td>
<td>On Thursday of the last week, they met in an upstairs room for their last meal together. It was when Jesus told them that he would always be with them - and us - when we share the holy bread and wine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Point to Jesus.</td>
<td>But something happened just before he shared the holy bread and wine with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sweep your hand over the apostles again.</td>
<td>Jesus said, “Someone who is sitting at this table will betray me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>All the apostles were shocked and sorry and angry. They cried out, “Is it I?” “Who is it?” That is what you see happening in the painting.</td>
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Later, Judas did betray Jesus. He showed the High Priest's soldiers who Jesus was that night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

These are the symbols of the apostles. Each one has a special sign to help us remember them and their stories.

Jesus is in the middle. The apostles are in groups of three on either side. Let's see who's here.

This is John. He is probably the one called the “beloved disciple.” John first learned about Jesus when he was with John the Baptist. Right away he told his brother, James, and they both began to follow Jesus. Both brothers were fishermen. Their father’s name was Zebedee. John is probably the one who wrote down the story of Jesus we call “The Gospel of John.”

Stories say that John was the only apostle who was not killed. He died on an island when he was an old man, full of years.

This is Peter. He is leaning in toward Jesus behind Judas. Peter often got angry. He looks angry now, but he became more peaceful as the years went by.

Peter heard about Jesus from his brother Andrew, who was with John the Baptist. He is sitting next to his brother, but it is hard to tell because of the way he is leaning in towards John. The two brothers look a lot alike.

Peter’s sign is the crossed keys and an upside-down cross.

One time Jesus said to Peter that he was the rock on which he would build the church. He then said that he gave Peter the keys to the kingdom.

When Peter was old, he went to be with Christian people in Rome. It was against the law to be a Christian person in those days, and the soldiers caught him. When they were going to nail him to a cross like Jesus, Peter asked them to
Point to Judas. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Judas is seated to the right and in front of Peter, three places to the right of Jesus. Judas is the one who went against Jesus. See? He is holding a bag with thirty pieces of silver in it. That is what he was paid to show the soldiers who Jesus was when they went to arrest him in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Motion as if moving a shield for Judas down over his head, but with no shield; there is no symbol for Judas. Sometimes the sign for Judas is a shield that is all black. Sometimes it has thirty pieces of silver or a rope on it. I wonder if that is completely true. I wonder if Jesus forgave him.

Move the shield for Matthias down from the row of shields along the top of the picture, over the head of Judas. This is the sign for Matthias. He replaced Judas as one of the Twelve.

Draw an imaginary circle around the next group of three, the three closest to the other side of Jesus. On the other side of Jesus are Thomas, James, and Phillip.

Point to Thomas. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Thomas is seated to the left of Jesus, behind James. This is Thomas. He is leaning behind James, so we see his face next to Jesus, even though James is really sitting next to Jesus. Thomas was the one who always asked the hard questions. He is sometimes called “doubting Thomas.”

Move the shield for Thomas down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head. His sign is a spear and a builder’s square. This is what a builder uses to make square corners on buildings. Thomas went to India to tell the people the story of Jesus, so he began to build the Church in that part of the world. He was killed in India for telling the story.

Point to James. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, James is seated to the left of Jesus, in front of Thomas. Show how James is really sitting next to Jesus, even though the face of Thomas is closer to Jesus. This is James. He is really sitting next to Jesus. His brother, John, is on one side, and he is on the other. He and his brother were fishermen, like Peter and Andrew. They worked hard for their father, Zebedee.

James learned about Jesus from his brother John, who learned about him when he was a disciple of John the Baptist. The two brothers James and John, together with Peter, made up an inner circle of three very close friends of Jesus inside the group of the Twelve. The three were there when Jesus was praying on the mountain and when turn him upside-down. He did not deserve to die like his Lord, he said. The soldiers did as he asked, and old Peter died on the cross, too, but upside-down.
he was praying in the garden, but I’m afraid they went to sleep three times in the garden.

The sign of James is three shells. He was the first apostle to be killed. King Herod Agrippa I had him executed. This is why a sword is also sometimes on his symbol.

Point to Phillip. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Phillip is seated to the left of James, three places to the left of Jesus. Trace how Phillip is leaning in toward Jesus.

Phillip is next. He was there when Jesus fed 5,000 people. They were hungry for the truth about life, and Jesus told them. The truth is that people need each other and need to love each other. Jesus shared a little bread and fish with all those people to show this in a way they could understand and yet would keep thinking about. Jesus was like that.

Move the shield for Phillip down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

His sign has two loaves of bread on it to remember that day when so many were fed with the bread of truth.

Move your finger across to the other end of the table, the right side of the table with the picture facing away from you toward the children. Then circle the group of three disciples there.

Now we will go back to the other side, clear to the end of the table. Here there is another group of three people. They are Andrew, James the Less, and Bartholomew.

Point to Andrew. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Andrew is seated to the right of Judas, four places to the right of Judas.

This is Andrew. We already know he is Peter’s brother. See how he is sitting near to Peter? Andrew was one of John the Baptist’s disciples, but when John the Baptist showed Jesus to him, he went to get his brother Peter, and they both followed Jesus. Both Andrew and Peter were fishermen.

Move the shield for Andrew down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

Many centuries ago the people of Scotland liked Andrew so much that they made him the patron saint of Scotland. If you should ever go there, you will still see his sign, the cross that looks like an “X” with a blue background. He died on a cross that was this shape.

Point to James the Less. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, James the Less is seated to the right of Andrew, five places to the right of Jesus.

James the Less is next. People called him “the Less” because he was younger or shorter than John’s brother James.
Move the shield for James the Less down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

Point to Bartholomew. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Bartholomew is seated at the farthest right of the table.

Move the shield for Bartholomew down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

Move your finger across to the other end of the table, the left side of the table with the picture facing away from you toward the children. Then circle the group of three disciples there.

Point to Matthew. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Matthew is standing to the left of Phillip, four places to the left of Jesus.

Move the shield for Matthew down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

Point to Jude. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Jude is standing to the left of Matthew, five places to the left of Jesus.

Move the shield for Jude down from the row of shields along the top of the picture until it rests right over his head.

James the Less’s sign is a saw. He was killed by a saw for telling the story of Jesus. Kings did not like to hear about following “a king” called Jesus, even though Jesus was a different kind of king.

Finally at the end of this table we come to Bartholomew. His name means “son of Tolmai.” He was told about Jesus by Phillip after Jesus told Phillip to follow him.

This is Bartholomew’s sign. He was killed by knives for telling the story of Jesus by people who did not understand.

At the other end of the table is the last group of three. They are Matthew, Jude, and Simon the Zealot.

Here is Matthew. He was a tax collector from Capernaum until Jesus called him. Matthew followed Jesus and later wrote down his story of Jesus, “The Gospel of Matthew.” It is the first book of the New Testament.

Here is Matthew’s symbol. It has three money bags on it to help us remember that he was a hated tax collector before Jesus called him and Matthew found peace.

This is Jude. His name almost sounds like “Judas.” The next-to-last book in the New Testament may be a letter by Jude.

His symbol is a ship sailing, because he went across the sea to tell the story of Jesus.
Point to Simon. With the picture facing away from you toward the children, Simon is standing at the farthest left of the table.

Move the shield for Simon down from the row of shields along the top of the picture so that it rests right over his head.

Sit back and pause a little longer than after each apostle’s presentation.

Sweep your hand across all the apostles and then return to touch the shield above each head.

Here is Simon. He was a fighter for his people and for God’s law, so he was called “the Zealot.” He was also a fisherman.

The symbol of Simon is a fish and a book. The fish helps us remember that he was a fisherman who became someone who fished for people to show them the truth about life. The book is the book of that truth. It stands for the Bible and especially the story of Jesus written down there.

These are the Twelve, the apostles, and these are their symbols.

- I wonder which one of the Twelve you like best?
- I wonder which one is most important?
- I wonder which one is most like you?
- I wonder if we can leave any of the Twelve out and still have all of this story that we need?

After the wondering is over, put the story away carefully. Return the lesson to its spot on the shelf. Then return to your spot in the circle and dismiss the children one by one to do their work.