

Truth Detectives: Cracking the Case of the Early Christians

Subject: Early Christian Apologetics

Grade Level: Elementary (Ages 6-10)

Time: 20 Minutes

Materials Needed:

- A "TOP SECRET" folder or envelope (optional, for fun)
 - A piece of paper
 - Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
 - **Optional:** Building blocks (like LEGOs) or modeling clay
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Lesson Plan

1. The Mission Briefing (3 minutes)

- **Goal:** To capture interest and introduce the main idea.
- **Activity:**
 1. Begin by asking the student: "Have you ever had to explain to someone why you believe something is true? Maybe why your favorite superhero is the best, or why something you said really happened?"
 2. Say: "Today, you are going to become a 'Truth Detective.' Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to travel back in time and figure out how the very first Christians explained their beliefs to a world that was very confused and had a lot of questions."
 3. If using the "TOP SECRET" folder, hand it to them and tell them their main clue is inside. (The clue is the story you will tell in the next step).

2. Analyzing the "Case File" (5 minutes)

- **Goal:** To present one core apologetic argument in a simple, story-based format.
 - **Activity:**
 1. Tell this short story in an engaging, narrative voice:

"Imagine we are in a busy city in the Roman Empire, almost 2,000 years ago. Most people worshipped many gods, like Jupiter and Apollo. But there was a new, small group called Christians. People were suspicious of them. Roman leaders would ask them, 'Why do you believe this story about Jesus? It sounds made up. How do you know it's true?'"

"The Christians had a very simple, but very powerful, answer. They didn't point to an old book. Instead, they said: '**We know it's true because we saw it. We ate with Jesus. We walked with him. We saw him with our own eyes after he rose from the dead.**' Or they would say, 'Our teachers were the ones who saw him, and they taught us everything.' They were *eyewitnesses*."
 2. Reinforce the key idea: "An eyewitness is someone who sees something happen. If you see a dog steal a cookie from the counter, you are an eyewitness! The early Christians'
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belief was powerful because it was based on hundreds of people who claimed they saw Jesus alive."

3. Creating the Evidence (8 minutes)

- **Goal:** To have the student apply the concept creatively. This is the core of the lesson.
- **Activity:**
 1. Say: "Okay, Detective, now it's your turn to create a piece of evidence for our case file. Your job is to show this 'eyewitness' idea in a way that someone else could understand."
 2. Provide the student with a choice of how to create their evidence:
 - **Option A (Artist):** Draw a picture of an early Christian telling a Roman what they saw. What would their faces look like? What would be happening in the drawing?
 - **Option B (Builder):** Use LEGOs or blocks to build a scene. Maybe build a little figure telling a group of other figures about Jesus.
 - **Option C (Symbolist):** Create a secret symbol that means "I saw it with my own eyes." How would you draw that? An eye? A person pointing to their eye?
 3. While the student works, you can ask gentle questions like, "Tell me about what you're making," or "How does that show the 'eyewitness' idea?"

4. Debriefing and Closing the Case (4 minutes)

- **Goal:** To assess understanding and connect the concept to the student's own life.
- **Activity:**
 1. Ask the student to present their "evidence." Have them explain their drawing, build, or symbol. Ask: "How does your creation help explain the Christians' message?"
 2. Ask a connecting question: "Why is it more powerful to hear something from someone who actually saw it, instead of from someone who just heard about it?"
 3. Conclude the lesson: "Great work, Detective! You've cracked the case. You discovered that one of the first and most powerful reasons Christians gave for their belief was simple: they were eyewitnesses. Mission complete!"

Differentiation & Extension

- **For a younger student (ages 5-6):** Focus entirely on the creative part. Keep the story very simple and use lots of pictures or gestures. The goal is simply for them to draw a person "telling a story about Jesus."
- **For an older student (ages 9-11):** After they create their evidence, ask them to write one or two sentences on the back of the paper explaining what an eyewitness is and why it was important to the early church. You could also introduce the idea of hostile witnesses or the fact that the claims were made so soon after the events.