

Lesson Plan: Windows to Heaven - Making Our Own Icons

Materials Needed:

- A few real icons to look at (if available). If not, have some high-quality pictures of icons printed or ready on a tablet (e.g., Christ, the Theotokos, the child's patron saint, or another favorite saint like St. George or St. Nicholas).
- A small, flat piece of wood (like a 4x6 or 5x7 inch craft plaque) or a sturdy piece of cardboard cut to size.
- A printout of a simple icon of a saint or Christ that can be glued onto the wood/cardboard (optional, for younger children).
- Crayons, colored pencils, or non-toxic paint and brushes.
- Gold or yellow paint, or a gold metallic marker/crayon for the halo.
- Mod Podge or a simple glue/water mixture to seal the finished piece.
- A small bowl of water and a cloth for cleanup.

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Explain in their own words that an icon is like a "window to heaven."
- Identify the halo as a symbol of holiness.
- Create their own "icon-style" artwork of Christ or a favorite saint.
- Demonstrate how to show respect to an icon (making the sign of the cross, giving it a gentle kiss).

2. Introduction: What is this Picture? (5 minutes)

- Sit with the child in a quiet space. Show them one of the real icons or a picture of one.
- **Ask guiding questions:**
 - "Who do you think this is a picture of?"
 - "What do you notice that is special about this picture? (Point to the halo, the serious and peaceful face, the colors)."
 - "What is this gold circle around their head? That's called a halo. It shows us that this person is a saint, a special friend of God who is in heaven."
- **Introduce the core concept:** "In the Orthodox Church, we call these special pictures 'icons'. An icon isn't just a pretty picture. It's like a window. When we look at an icon, it's like we are looking through a window into heaven and seeing the saint or Jesus looking back at us with love. It helps us remember them and helps us when we pray."

3. Exploration: Looking Through the Windows (5-7 minutes)

- Look at the other icons you have available.
- Point out common features:
 - **The Eyes:** "Notice how the saint is almost always looking right at us. They are paying attention to us."
 - **The Colors:** "Gold shows us this is a heavenly place. Red reminds us of God's love. Blue reminds us of God's mystery." (Keep it simple).
 - **The Action:** "Look at their hands. Jesus is often giving a blessing. The Theotokos is often pointing to Jesus."
- **Model veneration:** "When we see an icon, we show respect because it reminds us of

someone holy. We can make the sign of the cross and give it a gentle kiss, like this." Demonstrate the action on a real icon. Invite the child to do the same if they are comfortable. Explain, "We are not kissing the wood and paint; we are sending a kiss to the person in the picture—to Jesus or His saint."

4. Creation: Making Your Own Window (15-20 minutes)

- **Set up the art space.** Lay out the piece of wood/cardboard and art supplies.
- **Explain the activity:** "Now, you get to make your very own window to heaven! Who would you like to make an icon of? Jesus? Mary? Your patron saint? St. George the dragon-slayer?" Let the child choose.
- **Guide the creation process:**
 1. **Step 1:** If using a pre-printed picture, have the child glue it onto the wood. If drawing from scratch, encourage them to draw a simple face and shoulders. It doesn't need to be perfect! The focus is on the act of creation.
 2. **Step 2:** Have them color in their saint. Talk about the colors they are choosing.
 3. **Step 3:** The most important part! "Now let's add the halo to show this person is holy." Use the gold paint, marker, or a bright yellow crayon to draw a circle around the head of the person in their icon.
 4. **Step 4 (Optional):** Help the child write the saint's name or initials on the icon.
- While they work, talk with them about the saint they chose. "I wonder what St. Nicholas is doing in heaven right now?" "Jesus loves us so much, doesn't He?"

5. Conclusion and Sharing (5 minutes)

- Once the artwork is dry (or colored), you can paint a thin layer of Mod Podge or watered-down glue over it to seal it and make it shiny, just like a real icon. Let it dry completely.
- **Show and Tell:** Have the child hold up their finished icon. Ask, "Who is in your window to heaven?" "What does the gold halo mean?"
- **Find a special place:** "Let's find a special place to put your icon." Help the child place their creation in their room on a shelf or desk, creating a small "prayer corner."
- End the lesson by standing before their new icon, making the sign of the cross, and saying a short prayer together, like "Holy Saint [Name], pray to God for us," or simply, "Thank you, God, for our saints."

Differentiation and Extension

- **For Extra Support:** Use a simple, pre-printed coloring page of an icon and focus on the coloring and the meaning of the halo. Use chunky crayons or markers instead of paint for easier grip.
- **For an Extra Challenge:** Encourage the student to copy a real icon onto their wood block. They can try to add more details, like the folds in the clothing or the letters often found on icons (IC XC for Jesus Christ). You could look up the saint's name in Greek letters and help them copy those.

Assessment

- **Formative (during lesson):** Observe the child's answers to your questions. Do they grasp the "window" analogy? Do they participate in the activity?
- **Summative (after lesson):** The child's ability to show you their finished icon and explain who it is and that the halo means they are holy. Their demonstration of how to venerate an icon at the end of the lesson shows they have met the objective.