Stations of Contemplation and children

What are the stations?
The stations of contemplation are a set of activities that are designed to draw the participant into a state of stillness and silence. They were created by the Young Christian Meditators of Sydney for their ‘silent’ reflection centre at World Youth Day 2008.

Since the success of the stations at WYD O8, they have been used at Christian Meditation community days, retreats and workshops. Each station has a unique ‘theme’ eg. quiet prayer, walking a labyrinth or connecting with nature through the senses. The stations are not meant to stimulate a lot of thinking or conversation - their one purpose is to provide a pathway towards contemplation. For this reason we encourage the space to be one of silence and reverence.

How do children respond to the stations?
A group of primary school children from Sydney were recently introduced to the Stations as part of a reflection day in their Religious Education program. Students from Kindergarten (5 years olds) to Year 6 (12 year olds) all participated in their year groups for the one and a half hour session. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The children loved all the ‘activities’ and reported feeling calm after the session. In the following pages we have outlined the children’s and teacher’s comments.
A brief introduction to each station.

The Station of Uninvited thoughts
A poster reads “Did you know that on average we have 60,000 thoughts each day? How long can you go without thinking?”
An adapted clock with a blank face and only a second hand is on a wall or table. Participants are asked to observe the activity of their mind for a period of 60 seconds.

Station of Art and Wonder
Blank paper and crayons and specially adapted mirrors are on a table. Participants are invited to come to a state of stillness by guiding a crayon to 'dance' impulsively on a page, then observe the creation with the assistance of mirrors (the mirrors act as though looking through a kaleidoscope).

Station of Nature and Life
An arrangement of natural objects are displayed on a table eg. pinecones, leaves, shells. The participants are invited to reflect on
The Station of Prayers for the World

A selection of news clippings and images of poverty, war etc and a prayer book are placed on a table. Participants are asked to consider the images and silently reflect on the current state of the world. They are then invited to write or say a prayer for the world.

Station of Mindfulness

A bowl of raisins and set of tongs are placed on a table. Participants are asked to mindfully take a raisin and then take the time to use all their senses firstly by feeling it, observing it, smelling it and finally tasting it.

Station of the Labyrinth

This ancient spiritual tool represents the path of life. A handmade floor labyrinth is spread out. Participants are invited to remove their shoes and quietly follow the path to the centre and then complete the return journey.

Station of the Finger Labyrinth

A carved wooden finger labyrinth is on a table. Participants are invited to use their index finger to trace slowly from the starting point to the centre, to rest there for a while, then find their way back to the starting point.
What did the children have to say about the stations?

“I loved looking at the natural objects.”

“The raisins were all different but the light still shines through.”

“The labyrinth is like life, because sometimes you stumble and still find your way.”

“The stations made me feel calm and peaceful.”

“Do you think it is possible that your heart can fill your entire body? Because that’s how I feel.” (Year 3 boy asked his teacher this.)

“Can we do this again? Can we do this longer? I had the best fun” (General comments from Kindergarten)
What did the teachers say about the stations?

“The stations were beautifully set up in the hall. The silence was initially hard to establish as the children were very excited. I asked the noisy ones to just go and sit on the stage and observe for a while and very soon they were participating quietly. The Labyrinth and the “raisin” stations were the favourites. It was obvious from the children’s written reflections that the activities had made a big impression on them.

Teacher, year 3

“We began with a silent reflection and the children did extremely well at carrying the silence through to the stations. The children were thoroughly engaged at each station, particularly the tactile aspects of the tasks. They also really enjoyed the prayer writing.”

Teacher, year 2

“This was a great lesson, something busy classrooms need more of. It was great to see the children contemplating on the different activities. The raisins and the nature station were well used - others moved at their own pace on the labyrinth.”

Teacher, year 5

“My year 3 children are very connected with the importance of silence. They loved the stations. I asked them to move to where they were drawn. They loved the labyrinth and prayer writing. They went home peaceful and rested. This was a fantastic exercise and it would be ideal to have them each week incorporated into our daily prayer.”

Teacher, year 3
For more information on the Stations of Contemplation...

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