Decorating for Any VBS Theme

(from: http://kingdomservants.org/vbstips.htm)

Materials for Major Props

- Plywood: sand and prime before painting.
- Insulating styrofoam: Comes in 4' by 8' sheets at your home store. Cut with a knife-edge blade in your jigsaw. Peel off that thin layer of film on the side to be painted, or the paint will bubble. Tacky glue holds papers and fabrics in place. A full sheet can be attached to a wall with regular masking tape. Use *several* loops of tape along the back of the top and sides. When making 3-dimensional props, pieces of this styrofoam can be held together with long straight pins (if you want to be able to disassemble it to store and use again) or ordinary white glue.
- Foam Core: Cut with a knife-edge blade in your jigsaw. Much better rigidity than styrofoam, but more expensive.
- Corrugated cardboard: Cut with a knife-edge blade in your jigsaw. Can be painted quickly with a roller! Two thin coats with drying time in between is recommended.
- Corplas (corrugated plastic): Takes adhesives nicely, but *not* paint!
- Bedsheets: Outline a projected image on the sheet, color with chalk, and set the chalk with *hairspray*.

Useful Items for (Almost) Every Theme

- Artificial flowers and greenery, including Christmas trees
- Floor lamp stand: Becomes a lamp post, directional signpost, flagpole, or tree-trunk base. Use PVC pipe from the plumbing department, or a heavy-duty cardboard tube for a cross bar, to display a costume. Several crossbars could give a "towel-rack" effect for hanging small props or posters.
- Tension rods: use for curtains or banners within or between windows or doorways -- no hardware needed!

Fabric Uses

"Fabric" encompasses more than "by-the-yard" cottons. Try bedsheets and shower curtains for large backdrops or to hide non-theme areas. Is there an upholstery shop, canvas shop, or sailmaker in your area? You could be surprised at the size of what they might consider a "remnant." Can't hurt to ask! Tell the business establishment that you seek their throw-aways for your VBS presentation. Even in these "Christian-unfriendly" days, most people will give a discount to churches. Use fabric for these items as well:

- animal props (faux fur, fleece, felt, chenille; carpet or rugs)
- banners and bell pulls
- bulletin boards
- costumes; a full costume is always wonderful, but think also of using Christian and theme-related prints for:

  - aprons

- bandanas
- belts or sashes
- capes
- hats and headwear
- scarves
- vests

- doorway curtains (even to conceal a closed door)
- flags and pennants
- kites
- table covers
- table skirts
- wall hangings
- window curtains

New Uses for "Throw-aways"

Almost every business disposes of items unrelated to its product or service, that are just so much trash to the company, but *potentially valuable to the person who can see a different use for them.* Such cast-offs could be cardboard spools similar to those that hold electrical wiring, flat insulating styrofoam sheets from refrigerator cartons, wooden crates, or specialty packaging. And most places throw away boxes. Do you or your spouse have access to items that will get tossed out? Maybe a friend or relative works in a place with intriguing items destined for the dumpster? Something to think about. 😊

Scout Out Your Community!

Does your area have a film or TV production studio, a performing arts center, a dinner theater or playhouse? These establishments often have vast prop collections, including costumes. Could they be borrowed or rented? It costs nothing to ask!

Decorating Odds & Ends

- Collect theme-related pictures from magazines and mail order catalogues to make a colorful collage. Short magazine articles and even cartoons related to the theme, mounted on colored copy paper, can be an interesting wall-filler.
- "Frame" a picture or poster with bulletin board trimming strips, using glue or double-sided tape.
- Masking tape used generously will hold most posters to walls. Use twice as much when dealing with walls with *textured* paint.
- Objects related to the theme can be a classy addition to table or shelf when grouped together in a shadow box. Flat objects can be displayed on paper- or fabric-covered cardboard. Think postcards, stamps, flowers, photographs, travel stickers, buttons, and medals. Is there a story behind the items in the display? Add an index card with a few words of explanation. VBS can become a mini-museum.
- Some of your best friends for decorating are dollar stores, thrift shops, tacky glue, double-sided tape, masking tape... and people who will *loan* you things. 😎

- *Forget* how you think something "ought" to be done. Use what *you* have access to, in construction materials as well as the talents of your church family. A lot of "seniors" are happy to help with decorating projects -- they just like to be asked. ☺

Promoting Your VBS

Does your church have a Fall Festival or similar community gathering in place of halloween? Perhaps an Easter egg hunt? Portion out treats into small zip bags, and add a card advertising your VBS, *as well as a Gospel tract for unchurched guests.* With a magnet on the back, the card can be kept on the recipient's refrigerator. Or it could be in the form of coupons, with a special prize to any child who comes to your VBS as a result of that coupon. For whatever event or activity that attracts children to your church -- Christmas, Easter, school, day-care center -- have VBS posters ready to advertize the theme and dates.

It needn't cost a pretty penny to make up a colorful flyer regarding your VBS; "desktop publishing" has seen to that. Ask a computer-savvy church member to make one up and run off copies. Ask local businesses for permission to display one in their shop window. *After VBS is over, go back to those businesses and remove the flyer.*
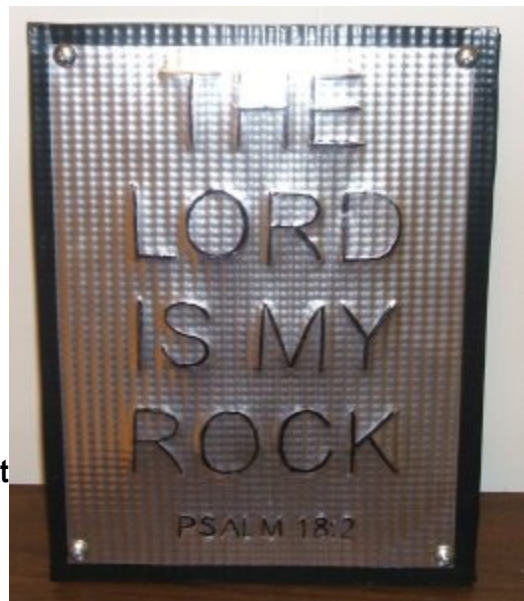
Some Cable-TV providers have a local station for FREE public-service bulletins -- investigate that when your presentation dates are confirmed.

Same with Christian radio -- my favorite local station welcomes advance notice of special events for addition to their online calendar. Then they broadcast that information for their listeners in the week beforte the event. And it's FREE!

Make a Monument Plaque

You need a somewhat padded work surface, such as an ironing board or a folded towel. Center a print-out of your text, upside-down, on a foil cookie sheet, using masking tape to hold it in place. Then use an ordinary ball-point pen, and trace over the lettering. Turn it over. Now that lettering is raised like a real plaque!

Next, trim away the outer rim of the cookie sheet, *carefully* -- the cut edges are sharp! -- and then cut along the edges of the print-out. Use a black Sharpie to make your lettering stand out. Remove the print-out and draw a 1/2" line within the perimeter of your now 8-1/2" by 11" plaque. This line is easy reference for your next step of covering that exterior edge with black electrical tape.

To add rigidity, I cut blue insulating styrofoam the same size, covered its edges with black electrical tape, and used tacky glue to hold the foil to the foam. Lastly, I added 4 screws to the corners for a finished look.

Make a Tree

You'll need a floor-lamp or microphone stand, a heavy cardboard tube ("core"), an umbrella (even if it's broken), one package (100-count or more) brown paper lunch bags, and green fabric / paper / streamers / foil / felt / plastic tablecloth / artificial leaves. Slide the core (heavy fabrics come rolled on these things -- check an upholstery shop and ask for one) over the stand. Cut the bottoms off the lunch bags, and scrunch them up and slide them onto the core. This yields a marvelous textured tree trunk. Now open an umbrella and drop the handle into the top of the bag-covered core. I used scrap fabric and cut pieces *the same shape as, but larger and longer* than my umbrella sections, and sewed them together. Then I threw this new cover over the umbrella, and cut deep scallops with pinking shears to resemble large tropical leaves. Surround the base of the stand with a burlap bag or a circle of green or brown cloth (roughly like a Christmas tree skirt), to conceal the base.