

THE SINGING MERMAID

CHILDREN'S SESSION

HELPING-HAND 2024

ANTI-TRAFFICKING

salvationist.org.uk/helpinghand

This session is aimed at children aged 5-11 and uses the story of The Singing Mermaid to introduce the issue of human trafficking in a safe and accessible way.

BACKGROUND

This session is part of the resources for the 2024 Helping-Hand Appeal which this year aims to raise awareness and funds for The Salvation Army's international anti-trafficking projects.

Human trafficking is a crime which impacts people all over the world. Traffickers often target those who are already vulnerable, socially isolated or simply in need of work. Often it is the promise of a better life or the chance to earn money which lures people away from the safety of the places they know and the people they love.

Through prevention, protection and partnership, The Salvation Army is working alongside communities to bring human trafficking to an end. This year's Helping-Hand Appeal is designed to help people to pray, raise money and increase awareness about the issue of human trafficking, and to stand alongside survivors.

Together, we can raise awareness.
Together, we can support survivors.
Together, we can strengthen resilience.
Together, we can stop human trafficking!

PLOT SUMMARY

The Singing Mermaid, written by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Lydia Monks, tells the story of a mermaid who lives in the ocean and loves to sing. One day she is discovered by a circus owner, Sam Sly, who promises her fame and fortune if she joins his show. Despite warnings from her friends, the mermaid goes with Sam Sly as he told her she would live in luxury and sing for royalty. She befriends the other circus performers and enjoys their company. However, Sam Sly treats her badly. He makes her stay in a small fish tank where there isn't room to swim, and when she asks to leave, he refuses to let her go. Time passes and the mermaid continues to sing as part of Sam Sly's circus, but she longs to return to the ocean. One day her friend the seagull flies past and hears her song. Alongside the circus acrobat - who teaches the mermaid to walk on her hands - the seagull helps the mermaid to escape and return to her ocean home.



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OPENING ACTIVITY IDEAS

Charades

Write down the names of various characters from *The Singing Mermaid* and ocean creatures on pieces of paper and place them in a bag/bowl. Each child takes turns picking a piece of paper and acting out the character/creature without making any sounds. Others try to guess who they are. Characters could include: mermaid, fish, acrobat, seagull/bird, dog, cat, juggler.

Two Truths and a Lie (for older children)

Everybody takes a turn saying three statements out loud. Two of them must be facts about yourself (truths), and the third should be a believable lie. The aim of the game is for the others in the group to correctly guess which of the statements is the lie.

True or False (for younger children)

Make a series of statements and ask the children to guess whether each one is true or false (eg, 'True or False: The largest ocean animal is the blue whale'). Children could shout out whether they think the statement is true or false, or you could choose another way for them to show their answer such as holding up a green card for 'True' and red card for 'False'; standing up for 'True' and sitting down for 'False'; running to one side of the room or the other etc.

INTRODUCTION

After the opening activity, explain that traffickers often lie to people to convince them to leave their homes and make false promises about the life they could live. In today's session we're going to read and talk about the book *The Singing Mermaid*. This is a made-up story about a mermaid who is promised a better life, but this promise turns out to be a lie. It may be a made-up story, but it is an example of a real-life problem that is happening in our world today – human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a cruel crime. It involves moving or transporting people who are then tricked or forced to do things that are not safe and that they don't choose to do. This could include working for little or no money or stealing for other people.



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BOOK READING AND DISCUSSION

Read *The Singing Mermaid* together as a group (a corps/group member may have a copy). You could also watch the story on YouTube: https://youtu.be/t_uCy24thkw

After reading it through, review the story by showing the children the specific pages to remind them, and discuss the following questions together, as appropriate for your group. Some children might like to draw or doodle to express their answers.

She sang to the fish in the ocean ...

Ask: The mermaid loves to sing! What hobbies/activities make you feel really happy? The mermaid sings to the fish and creatures in the ocean. How do you share your special skills with others?

He said, 'I can make you famous ...'

Ask: I wonder how the mermaid felt when she heard Sam Sly's promises? Do you think fame is always a good thing? Why or why not?

'Don't go! Don't go!' cried the seagulls ...

Ask: I wonder how the mermaid felt as she set off to the circus?

Now the mermaid shared a caravan ...

Ask: What might the mermaid have missed about living under the sea?

But she wasn't friends with old Sam Sly ...

Ask: Can you guess what kind of a person Sam Sly might be? Would you want to be his friend? What makes Sam Sly's actions wrong? Why is it important to protect people from being tricked or taken advantage of? How can we help to look out for each other? (you can talk more about this during the Wanted poster activity (see below))

And many a crowd cheered long and loud ...

Sometimes, even though we don't mean to, we can accidentally help something unfair happen. In the story, people gave Sam Sly money to attend the circus, not knowing he was treating the performers badly.



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Ask: Are there ways of being sure that the things we buy/use are made by people who are treated well? (Children may need a prompt about looking for the Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance logos on products – these show that the people who produced the ingredients/materials were treated fairly and paid a decent wage. Show them the logos at the end of this document and set them a challenge of looking out for them in shops.)

At Silversands a seagull ...

Ask: Have you ever helped someone in need? Tell us about it!

'Escape!' barked the dogs. 'Escape!' miaowed the cats ...

Ask: Can you remember any moments in the story where the mermaid might have lost some of her confidence? How do you think those experiences might have made her feel about herself and her abilities?

'Like this!' cried Annie the acrobat ...

Ask: This is a great example of using what you have to solve a problem. Where else might someone have to be resourceful to get themselves out of a difficult situation? (Eg if you were struggling with some schoolwork, you could form a study group, look for resources online to help; or if you didn't have enough money to buy someone a birthday present, you could make them a gift, or have a special outing together that doesn't cost money.)

Next week while Sam was snoring ...

Ask: How did you feel when you realised that the mermaid had a chance to be free? How do you think the mermaid feels now that she's back in the ocean? Can you describe her emotions?

REFLECTION TIME

We've heard a great story, and that story has helped us to think about human trafficking. Invite the children to ask any questions that they may have, or share any thoughts and feelings about the story/session. (These could be written down or shared with the group.)

Discuss: What are your thoughts and feelings about human trafficking? What would you say to someone who has been trafficked? What would you say to a trafficker?



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PRAYER TIME

This discussion and reflection time could lead into praying together.

Ask: What do you want to say to God about the things we've talked about today?

Explain that The Salvation Army is supporting communities around the world as they work to bring human trafficking to an end. Working together is really important. We can play a part by praying about this issue. The following prayers connect to the Helping-Hand Appeal actions:

Together, we can raise awareness: Dear God, we pray that more people will learn about human trafficking and how it is hurting people around the world. Help us find ways to keep each other safe.

Together, we can support survivors: We pray for those people who have survived trafficking. We pray that they will be able to recover from their painful experiences and get the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Together, we can strengthen resilience: We pray for communities who are working hard to stop trafficking, that the laws will protect people and that it will become impossible for people to be trafficked.

Together, we can stop human trafficking: We pray that those who lie and trick people will see how harmful their actions have been, and that they will stop. We pray that this awful crime will come to an end. Amen.

ACTIVITIES

Songwriting

You will need: pens, paper.

Inspired by the singing mermaid, invite the children to write a short song (either individually or in groups) about freedom, friendship, or following your dreams. They could write their song to a familiar tune (such as a nursery rhyme) or make up their own. Then they can perform their song for the rest of the group – or read it as a poem if they would prefer.

Colouring sheet

Print The Singing Mermaid colouring sheet from [Scholastic.co.uk](https://www.scholastic.co.uk) for children to colour in.



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Mermaid tails

You will need: a selection of old, clean adult-sized socks, cardboard, pens/pencils, decorative items, scissors.

Cut out a large mermaid fin shape and invite the children to decorate and colour it as they wish. Tape it to a large (clean!) adult sock. The children can place the sock over both feet so they can pretend to have a mermaid tail!

Wanted Poster

You will need: pens/pencils, paper.

Create a 'Wanted' poster for Sam Sly. Children can draw him and list his crimes (tricking the mermaid, taking her away from her home).

Discuss: What makes Sam Sly's actions wrong? Why is it important to protect people from being tricked or taken advantage of? How can we help to look out for each other?

The following activities highlight the importance and beauty of working together. To stop human trafficking, we must work together – using and sharing our different skills and talents.

Cardboard Loom Weaving

You will need: Cardboard, scissors, wool (in a selection of colours).

Cut notches along two sides of a cardboard rectangle to create a loom. Wrap string/wool around the cardboard lengthwise, creating warp threads. Then children can weave wool over and under the warp threads to create intricate patterns – invite the children to do two or three threads each so that they can all contribute to the finished pattern.

Singing Mermaid Jigsaw

You will need: The Singing Mermaid colouring sheet (printed), colouring pens/pencils, scissors.

Once the children have completed The Singing Mermaid colouring sheet ([Scholastic.co.uk](https://www.scholastic.co.uk)), the pictures could be cut into jigsaw pieces (make sure the children are happy for their pictures to be cut up!) They could then swap their puzzles and work together to complete them.



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Giant Puzzle Creation

You will need: large sheets of paper, scissors, tape, pens/pencils.

Tape together several sheets of blank paper to create a giant canvas. Then think of and sketch out a large image together (such as a beach scene, a mermaid etc). Cut the giant image into puzzle pieces (if time is tight, you could pre-draw or print an image that could be cut ahead of time). Assign sections of the puzzle to different people to colour in/decorate. Once everything is coloured in, put the puzzle together to reveal the collaborative artwork.

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Take a look at The Singing Mermaid Jump In! session for lots of ideas for engaging younger children: www.salvationist.org.uk/resources/discipleship/jump-in/the-singing-mermaid



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