

Theme Ideas

The science lab is full of anticipation, excitement and FUN! Make your VBS the best ever by using these ideas to make SonSpark Labs come to life for your VBS kids.

- Add an unforgettable dimension to your VBS by filling your church with the “Sights and Sounds” of SonSpark Labs (below).
- Use our suggestions to enhance the fun for your kids, or “Lab Assistants” (pp. 55–56).
- Your VBS team will love these extra-fun ideas developed just for them in “Research Team” (p. 57).

For even more ideas shared by VBS directors from all over, visit the discussion forums at liguorivbs.org, the Liguori Publications VBS Facebook page and the SonSpark Labs Pinterest boards.

Sights and Sounds

Sound of Science

On the *Music & More CD* are laboratory sounds to add a fun atmosphere to your VBS! Play these “Sounds of the Lab” through your hallways and outdoor areas. (*Music & More CD* is available from Liguori Publications.)

Scenery

Use the patterns and ideas from this guide and the decorating segment of the *Preview DVD* to decorate your rooms and activity centers. (Fiber-Optic Lab Lamp, Test Tubes and Lab Beaker Set are some of the decorating accessories available from Liguori Publications.) In addition, Liguori Publications has two preprinted Wall Murals, the new super-sized Jumbo Lab Backdrop and the popular Coloring Mural. Clip art is also available on our websites, liguorivbs.org, and on Decorating & Crafts Resources in the Reproducible Power Pack.

Enter In

Plan a cool entrance. Construct a large sign painted with the words “SonSpark Labs” on it. Make it large enough to span the entrance to your church parking lot, and suspend

it from trees or on tall poles. Turn your light poles into test tubes by wrapping the poles with Mylar wrapping paper. Attach circle-shaped Mylar balloons onto varying lengths of fishing line to look like bubbles rising from the tops of the tubes. Use **Balloon Bouquets** (p. 15) to line the walkways leading to your welcome center or assembly room. Attach Lab Entrance Cover (available from Liguori Publications) to door frame. Look for patterns on pp. 20–49 to make your entrances one-of-a-kind!

Decorating Contest

Every year at your VBS, hold a decorating contest. Give a prize to the room with the most exciting decorations. Or, instead of one prize, give a variety of prizes: Best Door, Best Ceiling, Best Hallway, etc. Find something special about every room so that each room receives a prize!

What’s in a Name?

Give your rooms or centers names appropriate for SonSpark Labs: The SonSpark Labs Studio (Assembly Room) for opening and closing assemblies and skits, Edible Experiments Lab for Snack Center, MasterMind Lab for Crafts Center,



TruthLab for Bible Story Center. Other centers could be called Momentum Lab (Games), Hands-On Lab (Theme Center, see pp. 59–80), Sound and Motion Lab (Music Center), etc.

Gathering Supplies

Write down the supplies and materials needed for VBS (snacks, crafts, games, etc.) on theme-related die-cuts, such as beaker, atom or microscope shapes. Place die-cuts in a basket for parishioners to choose. On a large sheet of butcher paper, draw a laboratory with shelves in the background. Post drawing on a wall near the VBS information table. After parishioners choose a die-cut, they purchase or donate the needed item and then tape die-cut to paper you prepared. A bulletin announcement will invite parishioners to “Be a Part of SonSpark Labs!”

Transitions

Use these ideas to signal transition times in your schedule:

- Through your sound system, play “Sounds of the Lab” from *Music & More CD*.
- Blow an air horn.
- Ask a volunteer to dress in a white lab coat or as the VBS mascot (see “Assemblies” on p. 58) and walk throughout your campus, playing a drum or blowing a kazoo.

Music, Music, Music

Make your VBS come to life using sounds. The *Music & More CD* provides lively songs to enhance your atmosphere and to help VBS children learn Scripture truths that help them discover great things about Jesus. Play the songs as kids gather for VBS to begin and while kids are waiting to be picked up, in rooms during activities, in hall-ways during transitions, etc. Don’t confine the music to indoor areas, but set up speakers outside as well.

How Far?

In a central area, such as where groups gather for assemblies or in the Snack Center, post pictures of different famous laboratories (NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California; Los Alamos National Laboratory, Los Alamos, New Mexico; Biosphere 2, Oracle, Arizona; Edison’s Lab, West Orange, New Jersey; Gran Sasso National Laboratory outside of Rome, Italy; W. M. Keck Observatory, Mauna Kea, Hawaii; Curie Institute, Paris, France; etc.). Under each picture, place a sheet of paper. Make a sign, asking kids to guess how far each lab is from the church. Kids write their names and guesses on each sheet of paper. Kids who get the closest (for each lab) win a prize on the last day or during the Closing Program. (You can find out how far each lab is by using an online map service such as Google Maps or MapQuest.)

Lab Assistants

Use these extra-fun, theme-related ideas to create enthusiasm and excitement for the kids at your VBS.

Group Names

- **Lab Items:** Brainy Beakers, Talking Test Tubes, Mighty Microscopes, Awesome Atoms, etc.
- **Areas of Research:** Chemistry Kids, Physics Fans, Biology Boppers, Geology Gems, etc.

Fun Days

Enlist the help of VBS children and team members to set the stage for SonSpark Labs VBS. Each day of VBS, ask children and team members to bring in or wear items to enhance the fun. Consider doing one or more of the following:

- **Hat Day:** Children and VBS team members wear fun, funny and fantastic hats that they bring from home or that they make at VBS using a variety of art supplies.
- **Funny Hair Day:** Encourage everyone involved in your VBS program to come up with an outrageous hairstyle.
- **Clothing:** Ask children and VBS team members to wear lab-related clothing one day. They could wear lab coats they decorated themselves, T-shirts with scientific designs, etc.
- **Color of the Day:** Using either the color of your choice or each day’s Daily Plan Pennant as a guide, decide on a different color for each day of VBS. Children and VBS team members wear the color of the day in their clothing or even in their hair!
- **Daily Plan:** Each day, children and team members wear something to represent the object on that day’s Daily Plan Pennant (sun, broken heart, Bible, cross, heart). At each closing assembly, announce what the next day’s object will be.

Photographic Memories

In addition to or instead of the SonSpark Photo Lab suggested in Special Events in Folder B of the *Director’s Planning Guide CD-ROM*, provide other photo opportunities at the SonSpark Expo, the Closing Program or other special events. Other photo opportunities could include the following:

- Children put on lab coats or SonSpark Lab Glasses (available from Liguori Publications) and pose with skit actors dressed as their characters (see *ShowTime! Assemblies* for descriptions of skit characters).
- In front of laboratory backdrop (Wall Murals and Jumbo Lab Backdrop available from Liguori Publications), place a long lab table. On the table, place a microscope, petri dishes, Test Tubes and Lab Beaker Set along with other lab flasks

or vases and other laboratory tools. Fill some or all of the beakers, lab flasks and vases with water dyed with food coloring, and add chunks of dry ice. Children wear lab coats and SonSpark Lab Glasses while posing as if swimming. (Test Tubes, Lab Beaker Set and SonSpark Lab Glasses are available from Liguori Publications).

Use the photos as a way to follow up with out of parish families. After VBS, arrange for volunteers to hand deliver the photos along with a parish brochure that includes religious education classes and Mass times, as well as a description of different ministry groups and contact information.

VBS Trading Pins

Put SonSpark Labs Stickers (available from Liguori Publications) on poster board or craft foam, cut out and glue on pin backs. Use for prizes or have children arriving early at VBS make as a craft. VBS team members can place pins on lanyards and distribute throughout the day. Children wear and trade pins all week.

Instead of pins, glue magnets to the backs or have kids make refrigerator magnets from SonSpark Labs Stickers that remind them and their families of the fun and Scripture truths they learned at SonSpark Labs.

The Golden Beaker

Spray-paint a large plastic beaker or cylinder gold. Use it in one or more of the following ways:

- **Offering:** If you collect an offering at your VBS, consider passing around the Golden Beaker to collect it.
- **Game:** Plan a scavenger hunt to find the Golden Beaker.
- **Award:** Distribute Golden Beaker to a group at each session's closing assembly (see SonSpark Labs Prize on p. 8 of *ShowTime! Assemblies*).

Autograph Day

Assign a day for volunteers and children to wear VBS T-shirts. Provide permanent markers for children, skit actors and volunteers to use when signing each other's VBS T-shirts.

Small Group Pictures

Select a different graphic image to represent each small group. Place die-cut (or photocopied and cutout) images on sidewalks to form a path, leading from the welcome area to the place where the group gathers at the start of each session's VBS. Use the same image on name tags, group signs, bandannas, visors, etc. Appropriate clip art images are available on the *Director's Planning Guide* CD-ROM, on Decorating & Crafts Resources in the Reproducible Power Pack and at liguorivbs.org.

Name Hats

With permanent markers and/or glitter pens, children print their names on bucket hats, visors or solid-colored bandannas and add other decorations. Additional decorations might include SonSpark Labs Stickers (available from Liguori Publications) or other art materials.

Visitor Recognition

Attach small prizes to helium-filled balloons, and give one to each visitor and the child who brought the visitor. Throughout the day, team members will be able to recognize visitors by the balloons and welcome them to VBS.

Songbook

Make songbooks for children to take home as a reminder of SonSpark Labs. Include the words from the SonSpark Labs songs as well as other favorites. Song Lyrics for the SonSpark Labs songs are available on the *Director's Planning Guide* CD-ROM.

SonSpark Labs Shop

Near your welcome center and/or the place where parents pick up children, place a decorated table and a sign that designates the area as the "SonSpark Labs Shop." Include for sale several of the prizes and other fun items available from Liguori Publications. Parents purchase items for their children as souvenirs of SonSpark Labs.

If you are in a parish where there is not a lot of disposable income for souvenirs, consider a "Free Stuff" table. Fill it daily with items that are free for the taking. The items could be theme-related or other small items that have been donated: small toys, books, individually wrapped candies, small articles of clothing, etc.

Guessing Game

In a prominent area in your gathering area or assembly room, place a jar or bottle filled with small items (marbles, water beads, craft pom-poms, etc.). Kids guess the number of items in the jar or bottle to win prizes. (Bookmarks, SonSpark Labs Stickers, Skin Decals, Water Bottles, Invisible Ink Pens, SonSpark Lab Glasses, Silly Bands, Atom Balls and Puzzle Cubes are some of the theme-related prizes available from Liguori Publications.)

SonSpark Labs on the Town

After VBS, ask kids to bring in pictures of themselves wearing their SonSpark T-shirts in various places: around town, at the beach, on vacation, at school, etc. Collect photos on a bulletin board or a large sheet of butcher paper posted in a public area. Keep it going year-round! With parent permission, the photos could be on a page of your parish's website or in a newsletter.

Research Team

VBS Team Names

Professor: Director

Assistant Professor: Assistant Director

Research Assistants: Activity Center Leaders, Guides

Lab Interns: Adult and Youth Helpers

Countdown

In your parish bulletin and/or in the lobby of your church or other public area, provide a countdown beginning 10 weeks prior to your VBS: "Only 71 more days until SonSpark Labs begins!" Each week update the countdown.

Dedication Service

Plan to hold a dedication service for VBS workers during a Sunday Mass. Enlist your priest's approval and help. Print the names of volunteers in a bulletin insert and/or read names aloud. Volunteers come forward and stand while the priest prays for them. Consider providing some theme-related name tags for all the volunteers to wear (Name Tags and Name Tag Holders available from Liguori Publications) and serving theme-related snacks after the service.

Prayer Box

Decorate a box with some patterns from pages 20–49, SonSpark Labs Stickers (available from Liguori Publications), clip art (on *Director's Planning Guide* CD-ROM or *Decorating & Crafts Resources* in the Reproducible Power Pack) or other images. Place in the team break room. Keep slips of paper and pencils or pens next to box so that team members can write down prayer requests and place in box. Each day, share requests at your volunteer meeting and then refer requests to your VBS prayer team.

Ask Me!

Prior to VBS, print up stickers or make buttons for volunteers to wear to parish activities that read, "Ask me about SonSpark Labs." Also try, "I'll be at SonSpark Labs. How about you?" or "I'm ready to have a BLAST at SonSpark Labs!" Use logo or other art from this guide or liguorivbs.org. Don't forget to add the dates and times for your VBS.

Dress the Part

Encourage your VBS staff to dress appropriately for the laboratory theme, wearing lab coats, T-shirts with scientific designs, SonSpark Lab Glasses, etc. Before VBS begins, consider buying matching shirts as "laboratory uniforms." Host a time for staff to decorate their own lab coats using tie-dye, fabric pens, fancy trims, Iron-On T-Shirt Transfers (available from Liguori Publications), etc.

Snack Attack

Show your VBS staff that they are appreciated with a special lounge in which they can take their breaks, talk with one another, pray together and enjoy snacks prepared especially for them. Provide a variety of sweet and salty items along with beverages. Here are some suggestions that have proven to be popular:

- **Brownie Bar:** Provide brownies, ice cream and toppings such as whipped cream, nuts, chocolate and strawberry syrup, candy sprinkles, cherries, etc.
- **Ice Cream**
- **English Muffin Pizzas**
- **Veggies, Chips and Dips:** Serve a variety of prepared vegetables, chips, dips and salsas.
- **Beverage Bar:** Provide a variety of drinks such as coffee, tea, iced tea, lemonade, bottled water, etc.

Daily News

Use the stationery borders on the *Director's Planning Guide* CD-ROM to create a daily newsletter for your VBS team members. Print important announcements, contact names and numbers, revised schedules or other changes, as well as anecdotes and/or photos from the previous day's activities. Be sure to include the session Q&A, Daily Plan and Bible Verse. Pass out the update at morning team devotional time, or place them in the volunteer break area.

Add-On Prayer Journal

On a wall in the staff break room, display a large sheet of butcher paper. Draw a line down the center of the paper. At the top, print "Praises" on one side and "Requests" on the other. Keep pens nearby for team members to use to write praises and requests throughout VBS. Consider asking team members to place a sticker next to any item they have prayed over. Encourage the team to praise God for the "Praises" as much as they ask Him for help with the "Requests."

Curriculum Resources

Familiarize yourself with the theme-related ideas provided throughout the curriculum. There may be ways to expand or adapt the ideas for use in other areas of your VBS. For instance, items made in the Craft Center can be used to decorate other rooms and hallways.

Panel of Experts

Visit the discussion forums at liguorivbs.org and see Facebook and Pinterest for even more ideas shared by VBS directors from the United States and throughout the world, as well as by the SonSpark Labs team from Liguori Publications!

Assemblies

Consider the following ideas to add fun and excitement to your opening and closing assemblies:

- A few weeks before VBS, have a weekend retreat for a group of 8 to 10 youth and/or adult helpers. During this weekend, volunteers learn the songs and motions, and rehearse the skits. When VBS begins, this group is ready and well rehearsed to perform skits during the opening assemblies and to lead songs during the opening and closing assemblies.
- Before VBS begins, search the Internet to find fun facts about chemistry, physics, astronomy or another laboratory science, and prepare a daily trivia contest. Have a leader, mascot, skit actor or other volunteer ask kids the daily trivia question(s) throughout the day at different activities. Kids who can answer the question correctly receive a small prize.
- As children gather, show a brief slideshow of photographs from different famous laboratories, observatories or other science institutions.
- Every day, have a puppet, or helper dressed as a skit character or lab character you have created, hide in the assembly room. Ask children to help you coax the puppet or character from hiding by whistling, calling out “Yoo-hoo!” or using some other signal. After the first day, children will delight in discovering the puppet or character’s hiding place.
- Make sure your assembly leader wears theme-related clothing. A funny hat is always a crowd-pleaser. Consider purchasing or making hats with an attached beaker, test tubes, microscope, etc. Wear a different hat each day!
- If appropriate in your setting, during your daily opening



or closing assembly, toss out to assembled children or have a drawing for individually wrapped snacks or other small prizes. (Bookmarks, SonSpark Labs Stickers, Skin Decals, Water Bottles, Invisible Ink Pens, SonSpark Lab Glasses, Silly Bands, Atom Balls and Puzzle Cubes are some of the theme-related prizes available from Liguori Publications.)

- Consider a VBS mascot who returns each year. Even if this mascot is an adult in an animal costume, each year the mascot can dress in theme-related clothing and lead different segments of the opening and closing assemblies. Each year, kids will eagerly greet this familiar friend.
- Arrange for a brief musical performance using different or unusual instruments. Musicians can describe the instruments and then perform songs.
- Make time for fun! Sing silly songs, play quick and easy games, joke with the audience and act like a child! Simply enjoy every minute of your time with your kids at VBS. Ultimately, this is what VBS is all about—building relationships.

