The assemblies

Assembly 1

You will need:

Music: the suggested music is the opening (3 or 4 minutes) of *Das Rheingold* from Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*. Encourage the children to listen carefully as the opening stillness of the music swells and ripples to its powerful climax. Alternatively you could use ‘Morning has Broken’ by Cat Stevens, or the Adagio (Hovis theme) from Dvorak’s *New World Symphony no. 9*.

Pictures to support children’s understanding of the assembly story. You will find these on the CD-ROM in the pack. They can be copied on to acetates or used with a data projector.

Flipchart and pens.

An outline of a large bare tree with lots of branches (big enough for each of the children to attach two leaves).

Introduction

Note: For children in the Foundation Stage, it will be more appropriate to introduce the work on Theme 1 *New beginnings* within a class/group gathering. A story that could be used in Foundation Stage settings is provided in the Red set: Later Foundation Stage.

Tell the children that this assembly is about new beginnings. Of course, everyone knows about the special times for new beginnings like the start of a new year, or a new class or a new term. Each spring is a new beginning as though the whole world is born again. Tell the children that, by the end of this theme, the space they can see will be filled with some very special artwork that they are going to do after the assembly, and the bare tree they can see will be covered with new leaves, just as it would be in spring. Remind them that new beginnings can happen at any time. Each day, each moment is full of possibilities – the possibilities of being, in some little way, a new person. In this assembly, the children are going to hear about a very wonderful new beginning. A whole new world is about to be created.

Outline

Ask the children if any of them have read or heard of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis. Tell them that this assembly story is from another of the Narnia books, called *The Magician’s Nephew*. The book tells of the adventures of two children, Digory and Polly, who get transported to another world. In the story the children are about to hear, Polly and Digory don’t know it, but they are about to find themselves at the very, very beginning of the creation of Narnia, the beginning of everything. This is what happens.

The story

Note: The story below is an extract from the *The Magician’s Nephew* by C.S. Lewis, reprinted in full as requested by the author’s estate. You will want to make full use of the illustrations provided, to support the children’s understanding. You may also want to tell the story in your own words.
Polly said, ‘Oughtn’t we to be nearly there now?’

‘We do seem to be somewhere,’ said Digory. ‘At least I’m standing on something solid.’

‘Why, so am I, now I that come to think of it,’ said Polly. ‘But why is it so dark? This is an empty world. This is Nothing.’

And really it was uncommonly like Nothing. There were no stars. It was so dark that they couldn’t see one another at all and it made no difference whether you kept your eyes shut or opened. Under their feet there was a cool, flat something, which might have been earth, and was certainly not grass or wood. The air was cold and dry and there was no wind.

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and Digory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to be coming from all directions at once. Sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them. There were no words, there was hardly even a tune, but it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard. It was so beautiful he could hardly bear it.

Then, two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the Voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count: cold, tingling silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn’t come out gently one by one as they do on a summer evening. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leaped out – single stars, constellations, and planets, brighter and bigger than any in our world. The new stars and the new voices began at exactly the same time. If you had seen and heard it, as Digory did, you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves which were singing and that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.
The Voice on the earth was now louder and more triumphant; but the voices in the sky, after singing loudly with it for a time, began to get fainter. And now something else was happening. Far away, and down near the horizon, the sky began to turn grey. A light wind, very fresh, began to stir. The sky, in that one place grew slowly and steadily paler. You could see shapes of hills standing up dark against it. All the time the Voice went on singing. It was soon light enough for them to see one another’s faces. The two children had open mouths and shining eyes; they were drinking in the sound, and they looked as if it reminded them of something.

The eastern sky changed from white to pink and from pink to gold. The Voice rose and rose, till all the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose.

Digory had never seen such a sun. You could imagine that it laughed for joy as it came up. And as its beams shot across the land the travellers could see for the first time what sort of place they were in. It was a valley of mere earth, rock and water; there was not a tree, not a bush, not a blade of grass to be seen. The earth was of many colours: they were fresh, hot and vivid. They made you feel excited; until you saw the Singer himself, and then you forgot everything else.

It was a Lion. Huge, shaggy and bright, it stood facing the risen sun. Its mouth was wide open in song and it was about three hundred yards away. The Lion was pacing to and fro about that empty land and singing his new song. It was softer and more lilting than the song by which he had called up the stars and the sun; a gentle rippling music. And as he walked and sang the valley grew green with grass. It spread out from the Lion like a pool. It ran up the side of the little hills like a wave.
Soon there were other things besides grass. The higher slopes grew dark with heather. Patches of rougher, more bristling green appeared in the valley. Digory did not know what they were until one began coming up quite close to him. It was a little, spiky thing that threw out dozens of arms and covered these arms with green and grew larger at the rate of about an inch every two seconds. There were dozens of these things all around him now. When they were nearly as tall as himself he saw what they were. ‘Trees!’ he exclaimed.

All this time the Lion’s song, and his stately prowl, to and fro, backwards and forwards, was going on. What was rather alarming was that at each turn he came a little nearer. Though its soft pads made no noise, you could feel the earth shake beneath their weight. The children could not move. They were not even quite sure that they wanted to. The Lion paid no attention to them. Its huge red mouth was open, but open in song not in a snarl. It passed them by so close that that they were terribly afraid that it would turn and look at them, yet in some queer way they wished it would. But for all the notice it took of them they might just as well have been invisible and unsmellable. When it had passed them and gone a few paces further, it turned and continued its march eastward.


Now you can explore with the children some of their ideas about the possibilities of a new world.

Remind the children that the two children in the story watched a sparkling, brand new world being created. Ask them to imagine that new world full of new people, children and adults, of many different colours.
Then ask them the following questions:

- What sort of things do you think would make that new world a good and happy place for those people to live in?

Encourage the children to think about the things that help them to be happy and safe in their own world and that they would want to see in a new one. Encourage them to think about characteristics such as love, kindness and understanding as well as physical things. Chart as many ideas as possible from all age groups.

- What sort of things would you want to keep out of this new world? What things would make the people unhappy?

Encourage the children to think about uncomfortable feelings such as jealousy and loneliness as well as big things like war and poverty.

Chart these on a different chart, and emphasise that these are the things we will try not to have in our new world.

**Conclusion**

Ask the children to find a still, quiet place inside themselves. Say that on the lists above they have remembered things that can make people happy or sad. These things often come from inside us and are the same in our own world as they would be in a new one. Remind the children about what was said at the beginning of the assembly, that there can be a new beginning at every moment of every day. Ask them to try and make this very moment a new beginning inside each of them. Ask them to focus on something from the list of good, happy things for the new world, and then to think how they could make that thing happen in their classroom, or their home, or in the playground. It might be being kinder, or more helpful; it might be playing with someone, listening to them or just smiling at them. Ask them to think deeply and quietly for a minute or two. Then play the music and ask the children to take their thoughts back to the classroom with them.

**Follow-up assembly to be held at the end of the theme**

**You will need:**

Someone to help attach the positive leaves (which will be made in the activities in this section) to the tree outline (see above).

A special bin for the leaves showing the children’s ideas of what should be left behind.

Two or three children from each class who are prepared to read out what is written on their three leaves.

Begin by reminding the children of the story from the first assembly about the creation of a new world. Children from different year groups will be able to share the dance, music and artwork they have done about the creation story at this point.

Remind them that each class has been learning how they could create their own ideal or dream school, and that every child has written, on different coloured leaves, what they would like to take with them or create for that ideal school, and what they would want to leave behind.

Ask the selected children from each class to read out what is written on their three leaves. Those children should then attach their two positive leaves to the tree and put their one negative leaf in the special bin.
Reaffirm what the children have said about what would make an ideal or dream school and what would not. Point out that everyone could help to make their own school a dream or ideal school if they tried to always remember what everyone had written.

Tell the children that on their way out of the assembly all their leaves with good, happy things on will be collected and displayed on the tree. Tell them that the tree, which was bare during the first assembly, will soon be bursting with their thoughts and ideas.

Say that they will be able to put in the special bin the leaves showing what they want to leave behind.

To finish the assembly, ask the children to sit quietly for a moment and remember what is written on their leaves. Ask them to think about how they could make their own school a happier or better place to be. Remind them that every moment is an opportunity to begin something, and ask them to create a new beginning that very moment.

Ask the children to hold their good thoughts in their heads for a minute or two, then play the music as they leave in silence, taking their thoughts with them.

**Variations on the assembly for subsequent years**

The introduction to the assembly and the questions following it are the same each year. The stories for each assembly are different. The assemblies follow a three-year cycle so that children will hear each story twice over a six-year period. In the second and third follow-up assemblies, tell the children the end of the story and then continue as with the first assembly.

**Assembly 2**

(Introduction as for the first assembly)

**Outline**

The story the children are about to hear is based on a version of the Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime myth.

**The story**

Two children followed the faint trail across the baked Australian earth. The old man walked behind them. It seemed to the children that they walked for miles, past stunted bushes and harsh, red rocks until their legs ached and they longed for the sight of water. They often looked back at the old man but each time he shook his head. ‘Not yet,’ he said. And then they saw it ahead: ‘The water hole’ they cried together and started running.
The pool was surrounded by shady trees, the water was dark and fathomless. They scooped up handfuls of it and drank. When the old man caught up with them he planted his stick deep in the ground. Then the children brought him handfuls of water and he drank too.

‘Is this the place, grandfather?’ they asked. He nodded. He beckoned them to the edge of the water. It was smooth and still again now, like polished stone.

‘Are you ready?’ he asked them. They nodded. ‘Then, look deep,’ he said.

The children stared hard into the water, and saw nothing, but around them, the trees and the light and the dust began to grow misty and dark. They could hear their grandfather’s voice, but it was faint now, as if it came from far away. They could just make out his words: ‘What you are seeing in the water is the land before Dreamtime,’ he said. ‘What you see is Nothingness.’

As the children stared into the water, the land around them grew darker and darker until everything, the trees, the water hole and their grandfather disappeared. The boy shuddered. ‘Grandfather was right,’ he said. ‘This is Nothingness.’ There was no light, no dark. On the flat earth nothing grew, nothing lived and nothing died. There were no people, no animals, Nothing.

But the cold earth was not still. Beneath the children it was moving slowly as if giants were breathing.

‘It’s the Ancestors,’ said the boy. ‘The Ancestors are sleeping under us.’ The children watched and listened. After what seemed like hours, or even years, they began to feel the earth move more violently and they heard great subterranean rumblings and grumblings. They trembled. ‘The Ancestors are waking,’ they whispered. They sat very still, holding hands as, beneath the earth, the Ancestors woke, at last, from their long
sleep. The children heard them yawn and stretch and stand up until, with a great noise, they burst out through the Earth’s crust. Some of the Ancestors looked like animals, giant kangaroos or writhing snakes, others looked like humans, some looked like plants, some looked like mixtures of many things. The sky grew light, the sun burst out, and the children laughed with delight as they saw the Ancestors wander off across the dusty plains.

Then the boy cried: ‘Look!’ And from a great distance the children watched, as three more Ancestors paddled across the sea in a bark canoe.

‘It’s Djanggawul and his two sisters,’ cried the girl. ‘They have followed the sun all the way from the Island of the Dead.’

When these three Ancestors reached the Australian land, they left their canoe. The children could see them striding across the dusty earth with digging sticks in their hands. When they thrust their digging sticks into the earth, they made deep holes where cool, fresh water or living trees burst out.

Wherever Djanggawul and his sisters walked, they gave names to everything: to the plants and the trees and the animals and the birds. When they rested they left their dreams in the special, sacred places, in the rocks and the earth. They came close to the children and thrust their digging sticks into the earth. The water hole appeared again and the Ancestors left a dream, there in the water.
The children sat as still as stones as the Ancestors passed before and around them. Somehow they knew that they were watching many, many years pass by. They watched the Ancestors give birth to the first people. They saw them teach the people about the sacred places, about how to find food and water, about how to survive through understanding and living with the world that had been made for them. At last the world was complete and everything was named. The two children watched the Ancestors as they sank back to sleep again. They slept under the earth, they slept in the rocks and the trees and the air and the water. The children could see them sleeping and dreaming there and somehow they knew that they would be there forever. The world they had made was bright and new and beautiful. The two children looked at each other, took a deep breath and then stepped out into the fresh new morning.

Explore the children's thoughts and ideas as for the first assembly.

Follow-up assembly to be held at the end of the theme

Remind the children about the story of Dreamtime. This is how the story ends:

The boy and the girl had many adventures in the wonderful new world, but at last they began to long for their homes and their grandfather's wise old face. They searched and searched for many days and at last they found the water hole where their adventure had begun. They held hands and stared into the water. They remembered the dream that had been left there. All around them the new world began to grow misty and faint until at last it disappeared, and there was grandfather, sitting on the ground with his back against a tree. They ran to him, eager to tell him of all that had happened, but he put his fingers against their lips.

'Tell no-one of what you have seen,' he said, 'until you tell your own children and your grandchildren. But keep in your heart for ever all that you have learned.' Grandfather turned and began the long journey back home, and the children followed him.

Continue as for the follow-up for the first assembly.

Assembly 3

(Introduction as for the first assembly)

Outline

The myth of the god Pan Gu comes from China and was written around the fourth century AD.

The story

In the middle of China was a city. In the middle of the city, a boy and girl sat beside a fountain. In the middle of the fountain, the water burst upwards and, there, forever balanced upon it, was a large, polished egg. The egg tossed and turned in the dancing water but it never fell.

The children felt as though they had been watching the egg for hours and they were fed up. Grandmother had told them to wait. She had said she wouldn't be long, but this was
long. At first the children had been excited by the city, but now they thought it was just too busy and too noisy and they wanted to go home. All around them the traffic roared and the people rushed this way and that. The girl scowled and splashed the water of the fountain with her hand. ‘I wish all this noise and bustle and traffic had never been invented,’ she said crossly. ‘I wish nothing had ever been invented.’

No sooner had she spoken than a terrible, screaming wind came whistling around them, faster and faster. The wind began to lift the people into the air, it lifted the cars and lorries up into the air, it lifted the buildings and roads up into the air, and last of all, it lifted the fountain up into the air. All of the city whirled away and away until the children could see it and hear it no more.

Then there was silence, and darkness fell and there was nothingness. There wasn’t even any land for them to sit on. The children floated around clinging on to each other. ‘This is horrible,’ said the boy. ‘This is just emptiness.’ But as they looked deep into the
darkness they saw that it wasn’t only emptiness. Floating in the sky above them, as it had floated on the fountain, was the egg. It was the same egg, they were sure of that, but it was huge, immense – as enormous as a whole world. For ages the egg hung there in the sky until the children, at last, heard a massive sigh coming from inside it. Somehow they knew that they had heard Ch’i, the first breath, the beginning of everything. From where they were, they could see that the breath had created, inside the egg, the opposites Yin and Yang and the creator god Pan Gu.

As the children sat and watched, it seemed as if thousands of years passed by. They could see that, as Pan Gu slept, he was growing to a gigantic size, until at last they saw him wake up to find himself trapped inside the huge egg. The power of Yin and Yang was trapped too. They watched Pan Gu stretch himself to his full height and smash one of his mighty arms through the shell of the cosmic egg. There was a tremendous explosion and the three became free. Yang rose to be light and sky and Yin became the heavy earth.

The children tumbled down to the cold ground and watched. They saw that Pan Gu needed to make more space between the Heaven and Earth, between Yin and Yang. They saw him plant his enormous feet firmly on the ground, heave his shoulders, and push. Each day, with his great strength, Pan Gu made the gap between Heaven and Earth a little bigger. Each day Pan Gu grew a little too. At the same time he chiselled and hammered away at the earth, carving its mountains and valleys. After many more thousands of years, the distance between Heaven and Earth was just enough.

By now, Pan Gu was thousands of kilometres tall, propping up the sky on his great shoulders. But it was hard and lonely work for him. Sometimes he sweated with the effort and sometimes he cried. The children saw his tears and sweat fall to the earth as rain. When he was happy the weather around them would be calm and lovely. When he was tired and fed up then storms and bad weather raged on the Earth and in the sky.

When Pan Gu’s work was finished, and he knew that the sky could support itself, the children could see that he was exhausted, and dying. His huge body began to fall, but as it did, strange and marvellous things happened. Pan Gu spoke and his last words
became the roaring thunder. He took his dying breath and that became the wind and
the clouds. His great body became the north, south, east and west of the whole world
and his blood became the rivers and lakes and seas. His flesh became the soil from
which plants began to grow. From his hair came flowers and stars, from his teeth and
bones came rocks and metals and precious gems. Last of all from his body came bugs
which turned into human beings. The children watched, horrified but fascinated, as
from Pan Gu’s death, the world was created.

It was a very beautiful world, clear and bright and new. The young sun sparkled on the
rivers and trees and it seemed as though nothing would ever harm its beauty. The
children turned to each other and smiled, then they took their first steps into this
brilliant new world.

Explore the children’s thoughts and ideas as for the first assembly.

Follow-up assembly to be held at the end of the theme

Remind the children of the story of Pan Gu and the two children. This is how the story
ends:

After their many adventures in the wonderful new world, the two children began to long
for home and the familiar faces of the people who loved them.

‘We have been away so long, maybe they will have forgotten us,’ they sighed. They
flopped down beside a bubbling stream. The sound of the water made them drowsy and
before they knew it their eyes were closing and they fell into a half dream. The boy ran his hand through the water. ‘Oh, how I wish we could just go back again to where we were,’ he said.

At that moment, the most terrible racket began around them. They opened their eyes and sat up amazed. There they were, back in the middle of the city with the traffic roaring around them, and the people rushing to and fro. Next to them the fountain sparkled and on the top of the water floated the egg. Best of all, there was Grandmother hurrying towards them. She gathered them up in her arms and hugged them tightly.

‘Let’s go home,’ she said. ‘It’s been a long day.’ The children looked at each other and smiled.

Continue as for the follow-up to the first assembly.