



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ENDINGS ART

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Death is an inevitable reality in our lives. We will all die someday. Everyone we love will die someday.
- If we face this knowledge with courage and grace, death can become a teacher. Death's inevitability has the potential to make our lives more meaningful.

Lesson Materials

- Images of paintings from the *memento mori* tradition
- Buddha Boards
- Brushes
- Bowls of water
- Still life: tulip, skull, hourglass.

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

The reality of death has become a definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by my looking death in the eye and accepting it, by accepting destruction as a part of life and no longer wasting my energies on fear of death or the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability. It sounds paradoxical: by excluding death from our life, we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it.

-Etty Hillesum

"Trisha's grandma used to say that the stars were holes in the sky. They were the light of heaven coming from the other side. And she used to say that someday she would be on the other side, where the light comes from. One evening they lay on the grass together and counted the lights from heaven. 'You know,' her grandma said, 'all of us will go there someday. Hang on to the grass, or you'll lift right off the ground, and there you'll be!' They laughed, and both hung on to the grass. But it was not long after that night that her grandma must have let go of the grass, because she went to where the lights were, on the other side. And not long after that, Trisha's grandpa let go of the grass, too."

- Patricia Polacco, from *Thank You, Mr. Falker*

And I will show that there is no imperfection in the present, and
can be none in the future,
And I will show that whatever happens to anybody it may be turn'd to
beautiful results,
And I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death,
And I will thread a thread through my poems that time and events
are compact,
And that all the things of the universe are perfect miracles, each
as profound as any.

- Walt Whitman, *Starting from Paumanok*

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- A confident, conversational approach to this topic, death, will reassure kids. If you convey a sense that it's easy for you to talk about death without feeling overwhelmed by feelings of sadness or fear, they'll be far more open and relaxed and ready to contribute to the discussion.

GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕒 2-3 minutes

Discussion Questions:

At one point in history, lots of artists were painting different versions of the same idea. This happens in art a lot, people get a creative idea and then everyone jumps on board for a while. One of these trends was called "Memento Mori" art. I'll show you some and you tell me what the paintings have in common...(the three images you'll show the kids are at the end of this lesson plan...)

- What do you see in every picture?
- How do skulls make you feel?
- Do we still draw skulls today? Do you see skulls in pictures or on posters? Where?
- Is there anything alive in any of these paintings?
- Does the boy in the painting look sad or scared?

It might surprise you that the artists didn't want us to feel grossed out, or scared or even sad when we look at these pictures. They wanted us to learn something from their paintings. The words "Memento Mori" mean "Remember Death". But how can we who are living remember death if we haven't died yet? Well, the artists hoped we would remember that death is *going* to happen. They hoped that if we remember death, then we'll remember something **WAY** more important: **WE'RE** alive.

The painters of these wanted us to remember that while were alive, like the boy in the painting, we can enjoy beautiful things, like the tulip. What do you think of this idea?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE THE IMPERMANENT IN ART WATER PAINTINGS

🕒 35-45 minutes

We have a set of magic water painting boards called "Buddha Boards". With water and brushes, you can paint an image on the board that lasts for a while, but then slowly disappears as the strokes dry. There aren't enough Buddha Boards for every child, so they'll have to work in pairs and take turns. We must take **VERY GOOD CARE** of these Buddha

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

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Boards, as they're an investment meant to last well beyond these lessons.

We'll spend time painting different things and we'll watch them disappear as the water dries. Give the kids a series of prompts for their subjects, the final prompt being a still life just like in the "Memento Mori" painting, with a tulip, a skull and an hourglass.

Giving each child a turn with each prompt, and then after all the children have painted it, ask the correlating discussion question?

1. **Write your name in an artistic way**

- After we die, are our names forgotten? How do our names last beyond our death? Paint a person

2. **Paint a person.**

- When a person dies, do they disappear forever? What part is gone? What part of that person might last beyond their death?

3. **Paint an entire family of people: Grandparents, parents, children...**

- In a family, there are often great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and children. In your painting, which of the figures disappeared the soonest – the ones you painted first or the ones you painted last? You could keep painting new people, right? But would the first people you painted still be visible? How is this like a family of many generations? Have any of your grandparents died? Will you tell us a story about that, if it happened?

4. **Let's paint this still life (tulip, skull, hourglass).**

- Does the still life look familiar?
- Were you able to paint all three things before something started to disappear? How did it feel to keep painting as things disappeared?
- Do you wish you were painting with regular paint and paper? Would you take your painting home?

Set the

Wondering Questions (to be asked during the mandala work:)

- Would your paintings have been different in any way if you were using paint that lasted?
- How is life like these paintings on the Buddha Boards?
- How is death like these paintings on the Buddha Boards?
- How often do you think about death?
- How often do you think about life?
- Do you feel sad or happy right now? A different feeling?

LEAVE THE BUDDHA BOARDS OPEN so that they dry completely in between classes and storage.
DO NOT allow children to use the brushes with anything but water.
PREVENT the surface of the Buddha Boards from being scratched or marred.
DO NOT allow children to saturate the entire board with water.

Thanks so much for helping to keep these amazing tools in good shape for years to come.

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, assume a comfortable meditative position or take each other's hands. Read these words from Mary Oliver to the children. Teach or remind them that 'mortal' means 'going to die'.

To live in this world
You must be able
to do three things:

To love what is mortal;
To hold it against your bones knowing
Your own life depends on it;

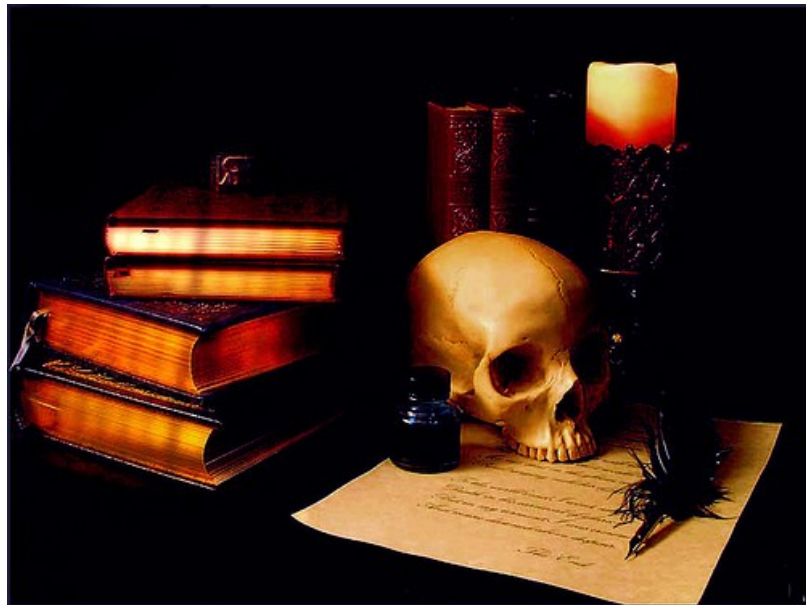
And when it comes time to let it go,
To let it go.

ART FROM THE MEMENTO MORI TRADITION

Vanitas
by Phillipe de Champaigne



Vita Brevis Ars Longa
by Rein Nomm



Youth with a Skull
by Frans Hals

