



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ENDINGS BODY

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

- Mandala coloring page, available from www.mandalacoloring.com.
- 4 x 4 floor canvas with mandala pattern stenciled on (with the help of an overhead projector and permanent markers)
- Colored sand. About 16 lbs of different, bright colors should cover a 6' diameter mandala

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*

**YOUR FIELD
EXPERIENCES:
FEEDBACK AND
NOTES**

GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕒 2-3 minutes

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever built a sand castle?
- How strong are sand castles? Do they last forever?
- What are some things that can bring an end to a sand castle?
- If we know that sand castles are just going to get ruined anyway, why do we spend time building them?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION: SAND MANDALAS

🕒 35-45 minutes

Together with all the other Sunday School teams, we're going to create a sand mandala. This is a Tibetan Buddhist tradition and a very complicated and beautiful art form. Our medium is colored sand. Our tools are these funnels and sticks. Our canvas is a blank mandala pattern on the floor.

Show the children some photos of completed mandalas and ask about the colors, patterns and images.

Does sand seem like a very permanent medium to create art? It isn't and that's what makes mandalas a sacred kind of creation. In fact, Buddhist monks use mandalas to help them think about death. Can you guess how?

Monks spend hours and hours creating these beautiful patterns of sand and then, with chants and prayers that remind them that nothing lasts forever, they destroy it on purpose.

We're going to create this mandala, and then on a Sunday in the future, we'll invite you to attend its destruction.

Creating the mandala

(There will be **THREE** mandalas: one for each service)

- Each child should pick one color and stick with it for a while. Instruct them to pay close attention to the pattern and where their color might fit best. It's worth taking a few moments to plan ahead and ask everyone how their work will contribute to the plan.
- We must all move and breathe carefully or we'll destroy the mandala

before we mean to. We must not push or bump or argue. We should help one another solve any problems that arise.

- If successive classes are to contribute to this mandala, it's best to start in the middle and work out week after week.
- The funnels have very small openings at the pointed end. The sticks can be used to rub or tap the sides of the funnel to move the sand more quickly or slowly. Invite the children to practice filling in a circle and following a line on a practice sheet.
- Take a moment every 10 minutes or so to invite careful standing up and stretching. You might try a pose from the Yoga Deck every once in a while.
- Children who are not interested in participating in this creative work in a sacred and careful fashion should be invited to watch from a distance.

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

- What are you thinking about as you create this mandala?
- Are you having to focus on what you're doing right now or are you thinking more about the moment when we'll destroy the mandala?
- Does it feel like a waste of time doing this, knowing that we're just going to ruin it?
- How is life like this mandala?
- How is death like this mandala?
- 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?
- Buddhist monks don't feel sad or scared about death. Why do you think that is?
- How does the idea that death is something that's coming and we can't avoid it make you feel?
- How would you feel if we came to the date of the mandala's destruction and people wanted to save it forever, instead?

The destruction of the mandala: May 13, 2012

On the last day of Sunday school, the DRE and ministers will attend the destruction of the mandala. Have four hand brooms available. Invite each child present to take a single swipe across the mandala and then pass it to another child until the mandala has been completely obliterated.

Have little bottles or baggies to send home a bit of the mandala sand in so that children can recall the experience of the mandala's beginning and ending.

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.