



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ENDINGS MUSIC

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

- Copies of the lyrics sheet (attached) for the hymns "The Lone Wild Bird" (15) and "Sing of Living, Sing of Dying" (306).
- CD of piano accompaniment for the above hymns
- CD of Mozart's *Requiem Mass*
- CD player
- Chalkboard or flipchart

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 SINGING
THE LONE WILD BIRD**

🕒 10-12 minutes

In our church, when someone dies, we hold a memorial service for that person to celebrate their life and to feel the sadness that comes with their death.

One of the songs that is requested most frequently as part of a memorial service is the hymn, “The Lone Wild Bird” (15).

There are two options for this activity: we can either sing this hymn with the children or invite members of the church choir or congregation to come and sing it for the class. The lyrics are attached; each child should have a copy to read along whether they’re listening or singing. A cassette tape or an autoharp can provide accompaniment.

Wondering Questions:

- I wonder why lots of people ask to sing this at the memorial service for a loved one who has died?
- I wonder how the picture that comes with the words “the lone wild bird in lofty flight” is related to death and dying?
- In the last few lines, the word ‘rest’ is repeated. I wonder how death is like rest? I wonder how death is different from resting?
- Would you pick this song for a memorial service? What are some other songs that feel right to sing when someone has died?

**LISTENING AND REFLECTING:
MOZART'S REQUIEM MASS**

We will use the emotionally charged movements of Mozart's Requiem to explore Kübler-Ross’ five stages of grief, which are often experienced by both those facing their own deaths and those who mourn them.

On Kübler-Ross:

Death makes us feel all kinds of feelings. We know that when people have to face their own deaths, they usually feel the same five feelings in a row, no matter who they are. Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross formulated the most commonly used conceptual framework around the stages of death and dying. These stages are experienced both by the person who is dying and those who witness and grieve the death.

Here is a basic overview of the stages. Share this explanation with the class before listening to the music.

First stage: Denial — The person pretends that death not really going to happen. Instead they act happy and talk of their being cured or saved from dying. What instruments sound happy and cheerful? What tempo would cheerful music have?

Second stage: Anger — The person gets very angry—maybe at their illness, and maybe at their doctors. Sometimes they even feel angry at their family, even if they don't know why. Many people feel angry at God. What instruments can sound angry? What tempo would angry music have?

Third stage: Bargaining — The person feels scared and they sometimes think that they can make a deal with the universe, God or life to avoid dying. They think about promises or changes they should make as a trade for being able to live instead of die. What instruments can sound scared or nervous? What tempo would nervous music have?

Fourth stage: Depression — The person feels very depressed. Sadness is the feeling we think of most when we think of dying. The person may not want to talk or be with people, even people they love. What instruments can sound really, really sad? What tempo would depressed music be?

Fifth stage: Acceptance — After feeling all the other feelings that come before, almost all people who are very near dying feel calm about death. There comes a point when many people feel a relaxed acceptance and readiness. What instruments can sound calm? What tempo would calm music be?

On Mozart's Requiem Mass:

Mozart wrote this long piece of music to be sung in church at funerals—church services for those who have died. Sadly, Mozart died before he even got a chance to finish it. That's how death is sometimes — it comes when we don't expect it and it interrupts our plans for living. Someone else had to write parts of this music to finish it after Mozart died.

The Requiem comes in 'movements', separate sections that have different tempos and moods. Let's listen to a couple movements and talk about them. You'll hear instruments and voices. Funeral music helps people to feel all the feelings that come with death.

We'll focus on the movements listed below. You can listen to 3-4 minutes of each and then pause to ask questions.

- Dies Irae
- Tuba Mirum
- Recordare
- Confutatis
- Lacrimosa
- Sanctus
- Lux Aeterna

Wondering Together

- I wonder which feeling seems to come out in this movement? Can you match the tone and key and mood to one of the five stages of dying? Which feeling is it most like?
- Can you imagine why someone might feel that way about death?
- I wonder what they might be saying?
- Which of the movements that we listened to feels most like how you feel when you think about death?

SINGING TOGETHER **SING OF LIVING, SING OF DYING**

🕒 10 minutes

The words of this hymn, “Sing of Living, Sing of Dying” (306) are beautiful and very accessible to kids. The tune, however, is challenging to sing. It’s probably a good idea to substitute the melody and accompaniment from another 8.7.8.7 hymn such as #66, #126 or #140. It will be easier to sing and will familiarize them with a more commonly sung tune.

Teach this hymn by lining the words with the children. Next, listen to the music. Then, sing the hymn together.

You might ask wondering questions about lines that interest you and the children.

- Have you ever sung about dying before?
- In your mind, are living and dying “joined in one” like the song says or are they two different things?
- How is living and dying like the ever-circling sun?
- The song talks about “helping others in despair”. If someone is despairing about facing death, how can we help them?

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.

THE LONE WILD BIRD (HYMN #15)

The lone, wild bird in lofty flight
Is still with thee, nor leaves thy sight.
And I am thine! I rest in thee!
Great spirit come and rest in me.

The ends of earth are in thy hand,
The sea's dark deep and far-off land.
And I am thine! I rest in thee!
Great spirit come and rest in me.

SING OF LIVING, SING OF DYING (HYMN #306)

Sing of living, sing of dying
Let them both be joined in one
Parts of an eternal process
Like the ever-circling sun
From the freshness of each infant
Giving hope in what is new,
To the wisdom of the aged,
Deepened by a longer view

Open to a deeper loving
Open to the gift of care
Searching for a higher justice
Helping others in despair
Through the tender bonds of living
In a more inclusive way
We are opened more to suffering
From the losses of each day