



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO

THE NATURE OF GOD

ART

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Our Unitarian Universalist faith asserts that each individual has a capacity for and birthright to an original experience of God. We seek no intercessors, no dogma, no special assignation of grace or salvation. God is immediately available to everyone.
- Prayer and meditation are ways to interact directly with God.
- There's a big difference between direct experience and indirect understanding.

Lesson Materials

- Objects for a still life (as sacred or mundane as you like): fruit, flowers, household items, things from around church
- Drawing paper
- Colored pencils
- Overhead projector
- Transparencies of prayer and meditation in art

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation [...] Thank God for these good men, but say, 'I also am a man.' Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it, because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator, something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's.

- from R.W.Emerson's *Divinity School Address*

Our age is retrospective[...] It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also [...] There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

- from *Nature* by R. W. Emerson

Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.

-Buddha

Reflective question for teachers:

Where in your life have you sought and perhaps found an "original relation to the universe? What are your experiences with prayer and meditation?

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- Create simple displays of solid colored objects for younger kids. Create more complex still life models for older classes.
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YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

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CHECK-IN

🕒 5 minutes

Allow the Journey Guide to lead the group in a name game, an icebreaker, a get-to-know-you questions or a simple ‘How are things?’ moment.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE HIDDEN STILL LIFE

🕒 25 minutes

- In this activity, we’ll experience the difference between drawing something directly and drawing through someone else’s perspective and instructions.
- In advance of the class, set up two small still life examples on two different trays. Set the first up in a corner of the room and screen it from general view using a curtain or a cardboard display unit. Save the second still life—draped or hidden from view—for later in the class.
- Pair children up, giving each pair two sheets of drawing paper and a set of colored pencils. Have each pair find a spot at the art table. Instruct them to pick an ‘artist’ and an ‘intercessor’ for the first round. Explain that an ‘intercessor’ is someone who ‘goes between’ us and something else. The intercessor will view the still life directly and then return to the table to share his or her perceptions and instruct the artist in drawing the still life. The artist, without seeing the subject directly, will draw the still life based solely on what is shared by the intercessor.
- After a set period—perhaps eight or ten minutes—signal the pairs to stop talking and drawing. Invite the whole class, including the artists, to view the still life and review their drawings.
- Repeat a second time, swapping roles and using the second still life model so that both children in the pair have the artist’s experience.

Wondering Together

Take some time to interpret this experience and make connections to the big ideas, using questions like the following:

- What was it like to have someone tell you what to draw? What was it like to try to tell someone everything you see?
- Did the intercessor look at the drawing from the same position every time? Did he or she look from the perspective you would have taken?
- When you draw something, do you usually do the seeing for yourself, too? Why?
- What if I told you that behind this screen was God. Would you want

someone else to look and tell you what they saw, or would you rather look for yourself.

If you were seeking God, trying to imagine God, would you rather **figure God out for yourself** or have someone else tell you what they saw when they were looking for God? Why?

- When it comes to our search for what is true, do you think that UUs would rather do the ‘drawing’, or the ‘seeing’, or do both for themselves?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO

PRAYER AND MEDITATION IN ART

🕒 20 minutes

- Using the overhead projector and screen, view some of the transparencies of art depicting people in prayer. If you only have time to discuss one piece of art in depth, select it by popular vote.

Invite discussion with questions like the following:

- Is anyone helping the person pray or meditate?
- How do you know they’re praying or meditating?
- What do you think they are thinking about?
- What’s similar between these two pieces of art?
- What makes this piece of art different from the rest?

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 2-5 minutes

Let’s not use someone else’s prayer this time. We can make up our own.

On the first Sunday of this cycle, the guide and teacher should allow the children to create a closing prayer for each other, one that encourages the kids to remember to trust their own direct experience of God and to remember each other as fellow travelers on the path. **WRITE THE PRAYER DOWN AND PUT IT IN THE JOURNEY GUIDE’S FOLDER!!**

“What can we say to each other and to the whole Universe when we leave this group to encourage each other to be courageous and trust our own hearts and minds to figure God out?”

Ask for some ideas and come to a consensus; **be sure to write down the words for next week so that the group can have a set closing.**

Repeat this closing week after week, hands joined, in a circle.