



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO

THE NATURE OF GOD

MUSIC

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

- Tape/CD players with headphones
- Tape or CD of unfamiliar but simple hymns or songs from *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Color-coded hand bells or table bells
- Flip chart with a color coded song
- Construction paper in colors to match the bells

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?

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
LISTENING: SUFI MUSIC**

⌚ 10 minutes

- Explain briefly that in the Sufi tradition—an offshoot of the Islamic faith—believers use special music to feel a closer, more direct connection to God. Some of the music is even thought of as a prayer or a love letter to God, written in sound. The music is sometimes slow, sometimes fast. Sufis feel that the music puts them in a state of mind where they only think of God. This is called ‘trance music’ by people in Western traditions.
- Let’s listen to some Sufi music. Play the CD in the player for the whole class to listen to. Be patient if they’re wiggly or inattentive for the first few minutes. It might take them time to shift into listening mode.
- If you feel pretty well in control of the situation, you can even let them spin slowly while listening. You can relocate out to the Yellow Hallway’s open area. Point out that Sufi dervishes spin with their right palm facing up to receive God’s love and their left palm down to pour that love into the earth.

Wondering Together

Ask the kids to reflect and share their thoughts on these questions:

- How did you feel when you listened to the Sufi music?
- What instruments did you hear?
- What did you notice about the rhythm? About the notes?
- Do you think or feel that music can connect us directly to God? Can music help us experience the universe? How so?
- What kinds of music do you enjoy listening to? Could that music help a person experience God?
- How do we use music here at church? What would church be like without music?

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- This call is entirely up to you, the workshop leader. You know that Sufi music is typically paired with whirling, dancelike motion. If you think the kids are able to handle spinning while listening, they can spin and change their tempo with the music. This could be crazy and it could be fun.

**YOUR FIELD
EXPERIENCES:
FEEDBACK AND
NOTES**

**PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO
PLAYING: INDIRECT MUSIC**

🕒 15 minutes

- This activity once again plays up the role of an intercessor in an indirect experience.
- We'll play a tune on handbells and tablebells, but we won't be able to see the music. Two volunteer children will be our 'intercessors'. One will see the music and another will relay the message about which notes to play. Everyone else should have one or two bells that they're responsible for playing. We'll see if we can even identify the song we're trying to play!
- On a flipchart, hidden from the view of the general group, a color coded song is written and can be played on handbells. This song can have no sharps or flats and must be written in the key of C. One volunteer children will be the only person to view the "sheet music". They will whisper the color to be played to the other 'intercessor' child. The second intercessor will pick the right color of construction paper and hold it up for the group. The child with the matching bell plays their one note.
- See if the group can manage the entire song in this indirect fashion. Allow whatever unfolds to happen naturally.
- Share some religious history with the kids:
 - In some traditions, especially in the past, only certain people were allowed to sing the songs or read the readings in churches. No one else was allowed to look at the music or at

Wondering Together

- Well, how was that? Was it fun? Frustrating?
- Is this the best way to play a song? What song *was* it?
- What was it like to be the intercessor?
- Was this more of a direct experience or an indirect experience?
- Want to try playing it as a direct experience? (Let the group see the "sheet music".)
- If God is in the Universe for us to experience, would you rather experience God

PRIMARY ACTIVITY THREE

SINGING: HUM-O-PHONE GAME

🕒 10-15 minutes

- This activity resembles the “Telephone Game”, where a person tells a story to a listener, who then tells it to another and so on. In our Music Workshop, we’ll do it with a song.
- On the tape are a few measures of several UU hymns from *Singing the Living Tradition*.
- First, we’ll line up. A volunteer child will listen to the recording itself using headphones. Then, everyone else will be ‘intercessors’, people in the middle who transmit the music to the child at the end. The last child should also be a volunteer, as we’ll ask them to hum what they finally heard while the class listens.
- Play a short part of the tape. Then rewind back to the beginning. Start the hum-o-phone and have each child hum the tune into the next child’s ear. When the tune gets to the end, have the ‘receiver’ hum it out loud for the class. Then, play the original recording.

Wondering Together

Save these questions for the moment when the Telephone Game comes to an end:

- Did the song change? How? Why?
- Did we forget notes? Add or change notes?
- If it was REALLY important to get this song just right, would the Hum-o-phone Game be a good way to pass it on? What would you have to do if it was REALLY important to get this song right?
- What if _____ (the last child) could have listened to the song on the tape for his/herself? Could s/he maybe hum it closer to the original?
- Is it REALLY important for you to understand God sometime in your life? If it is, would you rather hear the music that is God for your self or would you rather have someone tell you what that music sounds like? Why do you feel the way you do?

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.

“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.