

Earth-Centered Traditions

Lesson 1: Introduction and Overview

1.21.2018

Objectives: Introduction to course, and the turning of seasons.

Materials: Post-It notes, flipchart, tape, orange/blue balls, solar print paper, bins of water, lesson attachment.

Time allotments suggested and meant to be adapted for **75 minute class**.

1. **Nametags and Graffiti Wall** (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- “Graffiti Wall” questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ What outdoor places – from local park to a national forest – did you visit recently?
 - ▶ What does nature teach you about life?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. **Silly Fun: “What’s Your Favorite Junk Food or Guilty Pleasure?”** (5 minutes)

Each person secretly writes a favorite junk food/guilty pleasure on a Post-it note – food that most people would likely know, please! Each person then sticks their Post-it note on another’s forehead, and everyone walks around the group trying to guess the food item on their forehead. Each person can ask ONE “Yes or No” question PER PERSON at a time. The first ones to guess take their seat, until everyone has guessed correctly.

3. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice, saying these words together: *“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love.”*

Teacher reads: (from Forrest Church, UU minister and author)

“We are not human because we think. We are human because we care. All true meaning is shared meaning.”

5. **Joys and Sorrows** (10 minutes): Listening is a precious gift that we offer one another at church. Using the balance scale and the blue (sorrows) and yellow (joys) stones, invite youth to share a joy and/or a sorrow from the past week, as a way of *meeting* one another with our lives and *sharing* in community. You will want to set limits (e.g. two stones max per person) so that no one monopolizes sharing time.

Each Sunday, a copy of the congregation's *Embracing Meditation* will be made available to your class. Share this information, putting in stones for those whose names are being spoken in the Sanctuary.

6. Community Time: Getting to know each other (20 minutes)

For this very first class, please take time to get to know one another. In the manner of the television show *Inside the Actors Studio*, each youth will be interviewed by a teacher and respond to as many questions within 60 seconds. A second teacher will keep time. Teachers get interviewed, too! (See attached list of interview questions.)

7. Important agreements (10 minutes)

Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices/agreements will help “learning together.” Because this class is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where our best selves can emerge? Write these agreements on the flipchart and tape up on the wall to refer back as needed in future classes.

One important agreement for Junior High youth: youth will attend worship *at least once a month* with their families/friends (at either a *Story Sunday* or *Family Sunday* that occurs once each month). Unlike their younger siblings who may exit after the children's story moment in worship, Junior High youth will stay for the whole worship. Youth should think about interesting/meaningful moments during worship and be prepared to briefly share at the following Sunday class.

8. Earth-Centered Trivia (5 minutes)

Trivia Question: As we are studying earth-centered religions, we will want to pay close attention to nature. Does anyone know what major event will occur on Tuesday, March 20, 2018 at 11:15am (CDT) in the Northern Hemisphere, marking a significant change for the earth?

Answer: The Spring Equinox!

There are two equinoxes every year (in September and March) when the sun shines directly on the equator and the length of day and night is nearly equal, thus “equinox,” from Latin meaning “equal night.”

[Using an orange and blue ball to help demonstrate] The Earth's axis is typically tilted at an angle as it orbits around the Sun, a little away from or towards the Sun. But on the two equinoxes, the Earth's axis does not tilt but is perpendicular to the Sun's rays. As seasons are opposite on either side of the equator, the equinox in March is known as the “spring/vernal equinox” in the northern hemisphere and known as the “autumnal/fall equinox” in the southern hemisphere.

9. Further Interesting Facts (10 minutes)

Hand out slips of paper (attachment) containing interesting facts/questions about earth-centered religions. Invite youth to read aloud, in numbered sequence, and respond.

10. Celebrating the Sun's Slow Return: (15 minutes)

Before leading youth outside, extinguish the chalice (step #11). Wearing coats, lead youth outside to the garden area to make solar prints of objects in nature. Search for precious sunlight!

- a. Read aloud instructions for using solar print paper. Instruct youth to **work in pairs**, to use whatever sunlight to capture images of winter (twigs, stones, dead leaves, icicles, whatever around the church) and make a solar print. Let them know that **they MUST stay on church grounds**, and that bins of water will be ready near the back parking lot entrance to develop their prints.
- b. Distribute solar paper. While youth work on creating images on solar paper, fill plastic bin with water for youth to rinse and develop their solar prints.
- c. Leave enough time for youth to gather back inside and share prints.

11. Say goodbye until next time: Extinguish the chalice, saying together:

“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”

12. Help clean up classroom before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- return blue/yellow stones to containers
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets