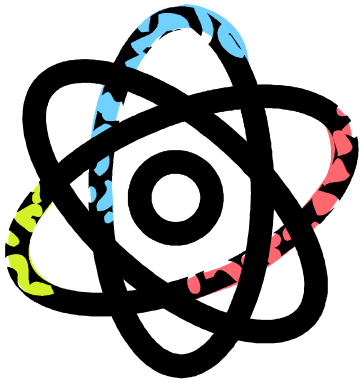

JOURNEY IN…
YEAR TWO
THE NATURE OF GOD
SCIENCE & NATURE

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

- Three circuit sets: battery, rubber band, 2 wires, light bulb or LED bulb.
- Copies of several religious texts: Bible, Koran, Torah, Tao Te Ching.
- Envelopes taped to the four walls of your classroom, each labeled "Is this North??". The north envelope contains something, the others

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?

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YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕐 2-3 minutes

Give the Journey Guide a few minutes to do a check-in with the group of children.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE
THE GOD CIRCUIT

🕐 30 minutes

- Three to six separate pairs or groups of 3 children will each construct a circuit that powers a light bulb. The necessary materials will be supplied to each group, but the instructions will differ. One version of the instructions will be correct. The other two versions will be incorrect. The teacher will not tell the children which set of instructions is accurate; they'll have to figure it out for themselves.
- All three versions of the instructions have the IMPORTANT warning NOT TO CONNECT A BATTERY TO ITSELF. This will result in the wires and battery getting hot and burning out.
- Divide the class into groups in whatever way seems comfortable: number off, draw slips of paper, allow them to self-select. Give each pair or team of three a circuit kit set.
- Only ONE child should have access to the instructions. The other one(s) should carry out the instructions, taking turns if there are two of them. The reader shouldn't show the text to his or her teammates.
- Tell them to follow the instructions carefully or they may burn out the battery. Give them 10 minutes or less to work this out. Set a timer for an appropriate amount of time based on the ages of the children. Sixth graders may only need 3-5 minutes.
- After the time is up, ask who successfully got the bulb to light up. Ask that group to read their instructions aloud. Ask the other groups if their instructions were the same or different.
- Collect up all the kits, carefully taken apart and kept as sets for the next class session.

Wondering Together

Invite some thoughtful discussion with questions like these:

Show the kids the stack of sacred texts and introduce this idea: "This stack of books are religious texts that people believe are instructions to finding out about God."

- Do you think that these books about God say mostly the same thing or mostly different things?
- Can they all be right about God? Partly right? All wrong?
- Did you know whether your circuit instructions were wrong or right?

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- How can you tell if instructions are wrong or right?
- Is there an instruction book about God?
- Did anyone already know something about electricity that made you question your instructions or feel good about following them?
- Does anyone already know something about God that might make them question someone who said something different?
- In our church, do we rely on written instructions to find God? How do you know? Do we rely on written stories and poems and ideas? Which ones?
- How can a person best figure out what they want to know about God?

Share this idea in your own words:
Unitarian Universalists think that each of us has a direct connection to the universe and its truths, just as direct as the wire between a battery and a light bulb. Some religions teach that there are things that have to be in between us and God—maybe a teacher, maybe a book that we have to read before we can understand God. Some religions teach that their instructions about God are the only true ones. We UUs think that each of us has to figure out how to connect our light bulb to the battery for ourselves, because sometimes instructions don't give us all the guidance we need. Sometimes we find that books like these give us ideas to experiment with, but we have to try things out and see if they're true.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO
OUR INTERNAL COMPASS

30 minutes

How does a compass work? Ask your class if they know. Give pairs of children a compass and ask them to figure out which way is north. When the class agrees, ask a volunteer to check inside the envelope to see if the group was right.

Wondering Together:
- How did you learn to use a compass?
- Which direction does a compass always point? Can a compass be wrong?
- Do all religions point toward God?
- If you had a compass inside you, what would it point to?

Share these ideas in your own words:
You have a compass inside you, too. It points toward Truth. You can learn how to use it to find out more about what you think about God. When you hear or see something about God, you can check your own compass to see if what you're hearing or seeing is true.

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.