

# Power of Myth

## Lesson 8: Initiation: Thresholds and Trials

4.8.2018

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**Objectives:** Explore initiations of heroes in films, and reflect on initiations in youths' lives.

**Materials:** Laptop/Youtube access, paper/pencil, worship programs.

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

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### 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:
  - ▶ If you ever joined a club, group, team, was there anything you had to do or demonstrate to become a member?
  - ▶ From your most recent worship (likely Easter Family Sunday, April 1), what’s one thing that you remember as interesting or meaningful?
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.
- **Please take a few minutes to invite reflections from youth about their recent worship experience. Use copies of worship programs as helpful reminder.**

### 2. Silly Fun: Counting on Each Other (5 minutes max)

Youth sit with their heads bowed and eyes directed at the floor, trying to count to 20 as a team. Here are the rules:

- a. Only one person can speak a number at a time. If two people talk at the same moment, everyone starts over with new person beginning count each time.
- b. Youth may NOT follow any prearranged order, or speak immediately after the last person speaking to their right or left.
- c. Game ends at 5 minutes, with highest count as the record.

### 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 the poet, novelist, and playwright, Alden Nowlan)

*“The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.”*

4. **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.

5. **Initiations: Crossing Thresholds and Passing Trials** (20 Minutes)

**Teacher summarizes:** In the monomyth, every hero has to cross a threshold from the everyday to the wondrous, innocence to adventure, from childhood to adulthood (e.g. *children enter Narnia through a magical wardrobe*). Ask the youth:

- How does one get to the platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  at Kings Cross station? (*Harry Potter and friends access it through the brick wall barrier between platforms 9 and 10.*)
- How does Luke Skywalker first encounter a lightsaber? (*In the very first Star Wars film, Luke Skywalker meets Obi-Wan—a mysterious mentor figure—who gives Luke his deceased father's lightsaber, only later to discover that Luke's father is, of course, Darth Vader.*)

These are threshold moments, moments of crossing into a new reality—literally or figuratively—where they will then be trained, tested, and readied to face their quest.

**Watch 3 clips:**

- Lucy Pevensie enters a magical wardrobe and crosses over into Narnia:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1O8v1yFoAwo> (2:15 min)
- Harry and his friends first encounter the flying broom:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTS1VlvIGRg> (4:09 min, stops after Prof. McGonagall comes to interrupt the young wizards)
- Luke's training with Yoda on Dagobah:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=infZSKB5L9I> (4:49 min, stops at end of Luke's training)

**Questions for discussion:**

- What makes these moments initiations or trials?
- What of the hero's old life is left behind?
- What is the hero's new world like?
- Does Harry pass his trials? Does Luke? How do we know when one has "passed" a trial or important test?

## 6. Real Life Initiations (20 minutes)

**Youth sharing:** Invite youth who are willing to share their personal experience of initiation, testing, or trial they experienced when setting out on a new course of life or adventure.

### Related questions for discussion:

- So going back to our Graffiti Wall, has anyone auditioned for a play? Joined a sports team? Started a secret club?
- How did you identify yourself as a member of that group? How were your skills or worth tested?
- In our culture, how will you know when you're an adult? What markers or **rites of passage** indicate this transition? (E.g. driver's license, drinking age, voting age, adult employment, getting married, greater independence.)
- What other rites of passage from around the world or other faith traditions do youth know? Some examples:
  - Jewish: *Bar and Bat Mitzvah*  
(Jewish boys and girls celebrate their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs at age 13 and 12, respectively, to demonstrate commitment to their faith and becoming full-fledged members of the Jewish community with responsibilities for following Jewish law.)
  - Amish: *Rumspringal*  
(In popularized view, a period when religious restrictions are relaxed for Amish youth so they can acquire some experience and knowledge of the non-Amish world. Among the Amish, however, this rite of passage is generally viewed as a time for courtship and finding a spouse.)
  - Hispanic: *Quinceañera*  
(With cultural roots in Latin America but celebrated throughout the Americas, a celebration of a girl's fifteenth birthday to mark the transition from childhood to young womanhood. Historically, in years prior to their fifteenth birthdays, girls were taught to cook, weave, and learn about childbearing by the elder women in preparation for their lives as wives.)
  - American: *Sweet 16*  
(While less rooted in tradition, the sixteenth birthday is nonetheless an important one for American youth, especially marking the age when they are legally permitted to drive a car... and with it, newfound freedom and responsibility.)
  - Ethiopian: *Hamar Cow Jumping*  
(Among the Hamar people of Ethiopia, the "Ukuli Bula" ceremony is a rite of passage in which a naked young man jumps over a line of cattle, symbolizing the childhood they are leaving behind and crossing over into adulthood. This rite of

passage must be performed before a man is permitted to marry and assume adult responsibilities.)

- Inuit: North Baffin Island

(In North Baffin Island, Inuit boys ages 11-12 have traditionally gone out into the wilderness with their fathers, to learn how to adapt to harsh arctic weather and test their hunting skills as a sign of entering adulthood.)

- What is the foremost rite of passage and threshold crossing for youth here at Unity Church? (Answer: Coming of Age!) What are some ritual elements you know about in Coming of Age? (E.g. being paired with a mentor, overnight retreats, interview with senior ministers, creating a personal Credo and delivering it in front of the church community.)

## 7. **Creating Our Own Rite of Passage** (20 minutes)

Divide youth into pairs, with paper/pencils and handouts. If youth had to design a rite of passage or ritual initiation that marks a young person's transition into adulthood, what symbolic or ritualistic elements would be part of that rite? Make sure it includes at least:

- Name of the rite of passage or initiation
- Activity of crossing a threshold, literal or symbolic
- Some type of test/challenge

Leave enough time for each group to share with the larger group.

## 8. **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."*

## 9. **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

## Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

*The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO8v1yFoAwo>  
(2:15 min)

*Harry Potter*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTS1VlvIGRg> (4:09 min)

*Empire Strikes Back*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=infZSKB5L9I> (4:49 min)