

UU History & Identity

Lesson 1: Introduction and Overview

1.22.2017

Objectives: Introduction to community and overview of UU history.

Materials: flipchart, tape, nametag materials, Post-It notes, paper/pencils, lesson attachments

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 is the best thing you did over winter break?
 - ▶ From memory, draw a picture of the UU flaming chalice.
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. **Silly Fun: What’s your favorite comfort food?** (5 minutes max)

Each person secretly writes a favorite comfort food on a Post-it note – food that most people would likely know, please! Each person 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 only 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 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 clergy and author)

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

4. **Sharing 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. 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 questions at end of lesson plan.)

6. Important Agreements (15 minutes)

Extend community sharing to discuss what community practices/agreements will help "learning together." Because this class, unlike many other classes, is not just about learning new information but learning about ourselves, how do we create a community where are best selves can emerge? Write these agreements up on flipchart and tape 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.

7. Introduction to UU History and Identity: (10 minutes)

QuickWrite: Give each youth a piece of paper/pencil and ask them to spend 2 minutes reflecting and writing a response to the question, "Why does Unity Church exist?" Go around the room and have everyone share or summarize their writing.

Teacher talk: Introduce the purpose of this class in your own words. Some talking points:

- This class will help answer the question "Why does Unity Church exist?" on many levels: Why are their UU churches in the first place? Why not attend another church? Who started our church? Where did they get their ideas? What does Unity offer that other churches don't? Is this a Christian church or not? Why or why not?
- This class reviews UU history and stories of our religious ancestors. We think of them as our ancestors because our very hearts and minds build on what they thought and did. People even gave their lives for the right to practice our faith.

- This class is a required course for 9th grade Coming of Age program, a culminating class in Religious Education. As youth, you will be asked to create your own statement of religious identity and share it with the entire church. The reason you can do this is because of the values and history the UU faith we have inherited.
- At the end of this semester class, we will see our place in history better. And when our peers ask about Unitarian Universalism, we will have a clearer answer than we did before taking this class.

8. **Timeline Activity** (15 minutes)

- On the wall, there will be a long, blank, laminated timeline tickmarked with centuries. There will also be small laminated circles listing events in our history, plus some sticky-tack for putting those on the timeline.
- Shuffle and pass out the events. Have each youth read their historical event out loud. Then have them pass their event to the person on their left, just to shake things up.
- The challenge is for youth to place their event on the timeline according to their knowledge or best guess. (You can have teams or just every youth for themselves.)
- After all the dates have been attached to the timeline, review them one by one according to the actual historical timeline (attached), and shift them accordingly.
- Explain that our roots go back as far as Judaism, one of the earliest monotheistic traditions. Christianity came out of Judaism and our own history starts with the church founded on the teachings of Jesus. We can think of Unity church as fruit or flower on a branch of a tree, the trunk of which is the Judeo-Christian tradition. The tree has grown quite a bit (!) in the last 2000 years, and while we have much in common with the other branches, we are also very different. We will learn the story of this UU tree in this class.

9. **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.”

10. **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

Timeline of Events

- Earliest written evidence of Judaism, the first major religion with only one God (1000 BCE)
- Jesus of Nazareth born (around 4 BCE)
- Jesus of Nazareth executed (33 CE)
- Christian church votes to decide if Jesus is the same as God (325 CE)
- Martin Luther starts the Reformation, when Protestant churches started splitting off from the Catholic Church (1517)
- Unitarian Michael Servetus burnt at the stake for writing books that reject the idea of God as a Trinity (three persons in one) (1553)
- First official declaration of national religious tolerance (in Transylvania) (1568 CE)
- First Unitarian church built in North America (1686 CE)
- First Universalist sermon preached in North America (1770 CE)
- First time a Unitarian minister publicly preaches that the Bible might not actually be written by God but by humans (1819 CE)
- Ralph Waldo Emerson preaches a graduation speech at Harvard in which he questions whether Jesus was any more divine than any other person (1838)
- Unitarians and Universalists work to abolish slavery (1830s)
- Humanism and atheism emerge in our faith (1860s post-civil war and/or 1918+ post WWI)
- Unity Church – Unitarian built at Holly and Grotto (1905)
- Unitarian Service Committee formed to save Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution (1940)
- The Unitarian Church and the Universalist Church merge together to form the Unitarian Universalist Association (1961)
- The Seven Principles are adopted as a statement of our faiths' common values and ideals (1961)
- General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association held in Minneapolis, MN (2010)