

Power of Myth

Lesson 1: What is a myth?

9.19.2021

Objectives: Introduction to myth

Materials: Flipchart, tape, Post-it notes, “Power of Myth” Laptop/DVD, lesson attachments

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

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:
 - ▶ Which of the following films have you seen? Initial your name next to each:
*Star Wars: A New Hope... The Empire Strikes Back... Return of the Jedi...
The Phantom Menace... Attack of the Clones... Revenge of the Sith... The Force Awakens... The Last Jedi... The Rise of Skywalker... Rogue One...*
Others: Harry Potter (any)... Avatar... The Lion King... Black Panther... Moana
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Silly Fun: Group Definition of “Myth” (5 minutes max)

Play “And... And... And” coming up with a group definition of myth based on what youth already know:

- Write on flipchart, “A myth is...” and ask first youth to say ONE thing they think is true about myths in general.
- Ask the next youth to read aloud the definition so far, followed by “AND...” to add another truth about myths. Keep going around the circle until every youth has added something.
- Example: “A myth is... old AND it is not literally true AND it usually involves supernatural beings AND it’s more interesting than reality AND someone’s usually on some kind of adventure AND we learn about them in 6th grade AND...”

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 the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke)

“How should we be able to forget those ancient myths, those myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses. Perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses, who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is, in its deepest being, something helpless that wants help from us. So you must not be frightened when a sadness rises up before you larger than any you have ever seen. Or a restiveness, like light and cloud-shadows, passes over your hand, and over all you do. You must think that life has not forgotten you. That it holds you in its hands. It will not let you fall.”

4. Community Time: Getting to know each other (15 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 as possible within 45 seconds. A second teacher will keep time. Teachers get interviewed, too! (See attached list of interview questions.)

5. 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.

***Question to consider:** The agreement to “assume positive intentions” and goodwill is vital for the work of racial justice and multiculturalism. But does that mean what others say/do out of good intentions will never hurt us?

- Are positive intentions (“I didn’t mean to...”) protection from all harm?
- Can we apply the same principle of “assuming positive intentions” when honest, critical feedback is given? (I.e. assuming critical feedback is offered not to shame us but to request change in behavior or language; assuming best intent while honoring impact and accepting accountability as an invitation.)
- What do you think about Unity Church shifting from using the language of “safe space” to “brave space”? Does one help achieve the other? Which one?

6. UU Six Sources Review (5 minutes)

Teacher says: In addition to the seven UU principles, our “living tradition” draws from six sources of wisdom and spirituality.

Pass out “Six UU Sources” (attachment). Go around and have youth read each source aloud.

Teacher asks: Which source/s inform why we are learning and talking about myths?

7. Metaphor and Myth (15 minutes)

Ask youth to complete attached activity sheet “Myths and Metaphors.” The first set of words are **adjectives**, the second set are **metaphors**.

Questions for discussion:

- Which set of words seemed simpler or more straightforward to understand, and which set seemed complex and open to greater range of interpretation?
- What is the difference between an adjective and a metaphor?
- What is your definition of a *metaphor* based on your understanding of the difference between the two?

Teacher summarizes: Trying to **define** a metaphor is really difficult, as metaphors essentially resist our attempts to **confine** them to any fixed meaning. Unlike adjectives that further embellish or qualify something, a metaphor’s function is to open our understanding of something familiar to what is unfamiliar, to a greater imagination, and to make connections that did not exist before. For example:

- “*Chaos is a friend of mine*” – Bob Dylan
- “*All the world’s a stage, and all the people merely players; they have their exits and their entrances.*” – William Shakespeare

Metaphors ask us to look at something in one familiar context but then look at it again from a very different context, like seeing something normally with our human eyes and then being asked to see it with a frog’s eyes!

Similarly, myths ask us to see with new eyes, listen with new ears, to those concerns that human beings have always wondered about: (1) questions about our life and existence, (2) some account of our origins and final destiny, (3) exemplars or ideals of individual and collective virtues, and (4) portrayal of our sacred values, beliefs, and rituals.

Myths are often (but not always) sacred stories of a people, speaking in metaphors about human experience and the nature of our life rather than with literal or scientific “facts.” They point to a Truth/Reality/Ultimate Horizon greater than our rational ability to explain; and so arguing about whether myths can be scientifically-rationally proven or disproven is to miss the point altogether. (*Cinderella* is **not a true story** that literally

happened to someone named Cinderella with a glass slipper, but it is surely a **true story** that contains timeless truths about the human experience!)

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
 - wipe the whiteboard clean
 - tables and chairs neatly returned
 - nametags collected in Ziploc bag
 - leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets