

Earth-Centered Traditions

Lesson 1: Introduction and Overview

9.19.2021

Objectives: Introduction to course.

Materials: Post-It notes, flipchart, tape, orange & blue marble, 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 UU six sources can you name?
 - ▶ Where have you been outside 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 max)

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.”

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. This class focuses on our six source.

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

7. **Earth-Centered Trivia** (15 minutes)

(a) **Group 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 Friday, [September 22, 2021 at 2:21pm \(CDT\)](#) in the Northern Hemisphere, marking a significant change for the earth?

Answer: The Autumnal Equinox!

(b) **Teacher says:** 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 marble to help demonstrate]

The Earth axis’s is always tilting (23.5 degrees) as it orbits around the Sun, a little away from or towards the Sun. This causes the seasons, solstices, and equinoxes. The equinoxes occur twice per year when the Earth's tilt is perpendicular to the Sun's light or parallel to the direction of the Earth’s orbit.

Since seasons are opposite on either side of the equator, the equinox in September is known as the [“autumnal/fall equinox”](#) in the northern hemisphere and known as the [“vernal/spring equinox”](#) in the southern hemisphere.

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

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