

Power of Myth

Lesson 6: Initiation: Thresholds and Trials

11.07.2021

Objectives: Explore initiations of several heroes in film texts, and reflect on initiations in youths' lives.

Materials: Worship programs, laptop/Youtube access, pen/cils, attachment.

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:
 - ▶ What club, group, team, or organization have you joined? What did you have to do to become a member?
 - ▶ From your most recent worship (likely Story Sunday, October 31), 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. Opening Discussion (5 minutes):

- Prompted by our Graffiti Wall, has anyone auditioned for a play? Joined a sports team? Started a secret club? Or another personal experience of initiation, testing, or trial when setting out on a new course of life or adventure?
- 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.*)

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, she becomes an adolescent; the day she forgives them, she becomes an adult; the day she forgives herself, she becomes wise.”

4. **Initiations: Crossing Thresholds and Passing Trials** (15 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. 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 Lucy Pevensie and her siblings enter into Narnia? (*Through a magical wardrobe.*)

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

Watch three clips:

- Lucy Pevensie enters a magical wardrobe and crosses over into Narnia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IO8v1yFoAwo> (2:15 min)
- Prince T’Challa takes part in the ritual to become the next Black Panther: https://youtu.be/F_18ZaS4pri?t=10 (5:00 min)
- Harry Potter flies on a broom for the first time: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTS1VlvIGRg> (4:09 min)

Questions for discussion:

- Does Harry pass his trials? (*Hint: Professor McGonagall ends up offering Harry the seeker position on the Quidditch Team, but focus on the above scene—the integrity, courage, and other values that inspire Harry to stand up to Malfoy and prove himself as a wizard.*)
- Does T’Challa? (*Hint: T’Challa does end up winning the fight, but focus on the above scene—his embrace of tradition, the trust people place in him by not challenging him, and his composure when he is challenged.*)
- Why is Lucy walking into the wardrobe a threshold moment?
- How do we know when one has “passed” a trial or important test? What makes these moments initiations or trials? (*Hint: Is the hero’s life changed? Is some part of them left behind? Is something new or gained?*)

5. Real Life Initiations (10 minutes)

- Ask what rites of passage from around the world or other faith traditions youth are familiar with. Using the list below, add details and additional 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.*)

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

Divide youth into pairs, with pen/cils and handouts. Give youth 10 minutes to design a rite of passage or ritual initiation that marks a young person's transition into adulthood. Encourage youth to focus on the two middle prompts:

- Activity of crossing a threshold, literal or symbolic
- Some type of test/challenge

Come back together and have each pair share with the larger group.

7. **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.”*

8. **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

Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

Lucy Pevensie enters a magical wardrobe and crosses over into Narnia:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lO8v1yFoAwo> (2:15 min)

T'Challa at Black Panther ceremony: https://youtu.be/F_18ZaS4pri?t=10 (5:00 min)

Harry and his friends first encounter the flying broom:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTS1VlVlGRg> (4:09 min)