

# JOURNEY IN... YEAR THREE

## ENDINGS

### MUSIC

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Grieving is a natural and necessary process that helps us heal from loss.
- People—kids and grown-ups—grieve differently and at their own pace, but all grieving people have some feelings in common and do similar things.
- Societies all over the world have created important rituals that help us start and finish our grieving process. We have important rituals like memorial services, funerals, wakes and commemorative dedications of places and things.

Lesson Materials

- TV/DVD player
- Lyrics for “Amazing Grace” from our hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*.
- CD of different versions of Amazing Grace

#### TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

-Kahlil Gibran

Grief can awaken us to new values and new and deeper appreciations. Grief can cause us to reprioritize things in our lives, to recognize what's really important and put it first. Grief can heighten our gratitude as we cease taking the gifts life bestows on us for granted. Grief can give us the wisdom of being with death. Grief can make death the companion on our left who guides us and gives us advice.

- Roger Bertschausen

He who conceals his grief finds no remedy for it. -Turkish Proverb

Sorrow makes us all children again, destroys all differences of intellect. The wisest know nothing.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I still miss those I loved who are no longer with me but I find I am grateful for having loved them. The gratitude has finally conquered the loss.

- Rita Mae Brown

Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted

- The New Testament – Matthew, 5:4

Take time before teaching this lesson to reflect on your own experiences with the grieving process. Which rituals and resources have been helpful to you? Are you still actively grieving any losses? of death at different developmental stages.

**TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON**

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**YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES**

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**GATHERING AND FOCUSING**

⌚ 5-10 minutes

Take a moment to introduce or review the language and concepts that we're using in this lesson. Start by asking a child to volunteer a definition; fill in and round out the meaning of each word as necessary.

- Grief—a process of healing from loss through feeling big feelings, sharing thoughts and memories and taking part in rituals that help us move through the sadness back into a full life
- Bereaved—a word that describes people or families who have recently lost a loved one or friend to death
- Deceased—a word that describes or stands for a person who has died
- Mourn—a word that means to actively feel sad and participate in the rituals that follow the death of a loved one

**PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE  
JAZZ FUNERALS**

⌚ 15-20 minutes

Set the stage for this exploration by asking the class what sort of music one might sing or hear at a funeral or memorial service. How would the music make them feel? Is it okay to feel sad or bad after someone dies?

Some of the feelings that come up during the grieving process are not sad feelings at all. Sometimes memories make us feel warm and happy. Sometimes thinking about the life and love that we shared with the person who died makes us want to celebrate.

While most traditions of mourning are sad and share the pain of loss, jazz funerals are, in part, a celebration. We'll learn a little about jazz funerals—a predominantly African-American tradition from New Orleans—through a slide show and some music.

Share this information with the class before you share the slide show and play the music:

- Usually, a jazz funeral looks like a parade. At first, the family and friends of the person who has died march slowly in a long crowd behind the vehicle carrying the body. With the family marches a brass band. Who can guess what kind of instruments play in a brass band?
- At the start of the jazz funeral, the band plays sad songs and hymns

### TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

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from church. This helps express the feelings of loss and sadness that come with the death of a loved one.

- Once the body has been buried in the cemetery and the funeral procession is ready to leave, the music picks up. The hymns are swiny, hopeful songs. The beat is faster and some people even dance. The sense is that the person's body has been let go and their spirit lives on. Mourning turns into celebration.
- Years ago, some people in the South thought it was unseemly and inappropriate to have these kinds of funerals, even though the music really helped families to grieve. They complained that funerals should be sad, somber events and after that, jazz funerals became rare.

Play the DVD slide show with images and music from jazz funerals. Feel free to pause or replay as necessary. After the viewing, start a discussion with questions like the following:

#### Wondering Together

- What did you *see* in the images that made it clear that people were grieving?
- What did you *hear* in the music that made it clear that people were grieving?
- I wonder how you feel about the idea of playing happy music at a funeral?
- I wonder if you'd feel more comfortable at a funeral that had sad, somber music or one that had happy, celebratory music?
- I wonder if most people prefer the idea that people will be sad and miss them after they die or the idea that people will celebrate their life after they've died?
- I wonder how you'd feel if you were asked to march or play or dance in a jazz funeral?

## PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO

### AMAZING GRACE

🕒 25-30 minutes

One song that gets played and sung at funerals all around our nation is the hymn 'Amazing Grace'. This hymn is a Christian song that offers comfort and thanks for life and hope for people who feel grief. There's a very good chance that in your lifetime, you will hear and perhaps sing this song at a memorial service or funeral. The words mean different things to different people. There are hundreds different versions, all of which add different musical feelings to the song.

We'll learn just the first verse and then listen to a few versions. Then, we'll vote on which one we'd feel most comforted or helped by if we were to hear or sing it at a funeral or memorial service.

### Wondering Together

- I wonder what the words of the song made you think or feel?
- I wonder which version of the song you think would be most helpful for you to hear or sing at a memorial service?
- I wonder what kind of music would help you to feel sad feelings during the grieving process?
- I wonder what kind of music would help you to recall happy memories?

## **CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING**

⌚ 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, take each other's hands and speak these words:

*Life and death are one and the same,  
like the river and the ocean.*

*Grief is the invisible ache in our hearts  
and grief is the healing of that ache, too.*

*Grief is like the river, too, never taking the straightest path  
but flowing where it needs to flow.*

*Love is like the ocean, too, great and deep,  
touching even the shores we cannot see.*

# AMAZING GRACE

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear.  
And grace, my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far  
and grace will lead me home.

When we've been here ten thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun.  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Than when we've first begun.

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This hymn is said to be the most well-known song in English throughout the world, sung in public more than 10 million times every year. It was written by a man named John Newton who had a spiritual experience when he survived a terrible storm at sea. This song became important to African-Americans as a song of hope. Since the 1950s, it has become the most commonly played hymn at funerals and memorials. It has been played following American national disasters such as the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the September 11 attacks.

What is “grace” anyway? Grace is a religious word meaning “kindness or favor that we don’t deserve”. Some people, including our Universalist ancestors, think of God as a source of love and kindness that people don’t have to do anything to deserve. For many people who grieve, they feel that even though they didn’t do anything to deserve it, they benefit from other people’s kindness and help. Maybe this is why people feel better when they sing this hymn at funerals and memorials.

# Brief Notes on Children's Understanding of Death

## Ages 3-5

While these lessons are not intended for this age group, it's important to know where the children in your Sunday School class are coming from, developmentally speaking, and to recognize that some children may still display characteristics of this stage as they grow at their own pace.

Concrete thinking is characteristic of this age, thus it is important to use the real language, simple, and direct with no euphemisms. "Lost," "passed away," or "asleep" are confusing and frightening. "Death is when the whole body stops working" is the best approach, using examples of dead birds, insects and animals that have been observed in the past.

## Ages 6-9

This age child likes to be included in the family conversation about the death, and has a greater capacity to understand. He also gets satisfaction out of "doing," so that giving him age-related tasks can be helpful. Writing a poem, drawing a picture, or writing a letter to be placed in the casket or hung on the wall is appropriate.

Death becomes real and irreversible for this age group, which can be a profound realization. Death might be personified as a bogeyman or a skeleton, and is usually seen as an external force. This child may fear that someone else will also die, so realistic reassurance that "most people live to a very, very old age" is helpful.

## Ages 9-12

These children are capable of more abstract thinking and often are fascinated by the biology of disease. They may also think that the death is a punishment for something they or someone else did wrong. They benefit from the same reassurance as younger children that they did not cause the death.

Peers become important to this age group. Some children may choose not to share with friends what is happening at home for fear of embarrassment, for being "different." They may resent that their family is not "normal".

- from Allina Grief Resources, [www.allina.com](http://www.allina.com)