

JOURNEY IN...

YEAR THREE

ENDINGS

SCIENCE

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

- PowerPoint slideshow of images included here
- Projector/Screen
- Classroom copies of comparison chart
- Copies of environmental handout for children to take home
- Pencils, paper, clipboards for possible surveys

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?

-Kalil Gibran

Grief itself is a medicine

- William Cowper

It's so curious: one can resist tears and 'behave' very well in the hardest hours of grief. But then someone makes you a friendly sign behind a window, or one notices that a flower that was in bud only yesterday has suddenly blossomed, or a letter slips from a drawer... and everything collapses.

~Colette

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

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present.

~Jan Glidewell

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?

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- This lesson is going to be difficult for 1st and 2nd graders who aren't readers. You can help by reading aloud and by focusing on the activity with the images as opposed to the activity with the comparative table of mourning practices.
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GATHERING AND FOCUSING

⌚ 5-10 minutes

Review the meaning of the word 'grieving', which for our purposes we're defining as 'actively feeling and showing sadness following a person's death.'

Ask the class if they imagine that all people grieve (or *mourn*) their losses in the same way or in different ways. Offer the idea that in different places around the world, people mourn differently. We can wonder about the way they feel and show sadness and we can compare it to our own ways.

Check in with your class to see if anyone has experienced a loss or participated in mourning rituals. Feel free to share a story from your own life.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE IMAGES OF MOURNING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

⌚ 15-20 minutes

No matter where we are in the world, mourning rituals have been invented to help bereaved people do the same things:

- Say goodbye to the person who has died
- Show how they loved and cared for the person while he or she was alive
- Express how sad they feel
- Accept help and care from friends and family
- Remember the good things about the person and his or her life
- Take some steps toward getting back to their own life

Show the children the images of mourning (pages 6-17 of this lesson) one at a time, reading the captions. This can be presented as a PowerPoint or in the form of flashcards. Invite each child to either 1.) point out something interesting about the photo or 2.) share what they wonder about when they think about the photo.

Wondering Together

- I wonder what feelings you feel when you look at this photo?
- I wonder if anything seems unusual or strange in this photo?
- I wonder if anything seems comforting or calming in the photo?
- I wonder why this mourning practice got invented?

YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

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- I wonder how doing the things in the photos might help someone heal from the loss of a loved one to death?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO COMPARING AND CONTRASTING: MOURNING PRACTICES IN OUR COMMUNITY

⌚ 15 minutes

Attached is a table that describes, in brief, the way that people from different religions mourn their dead: Unitarian Universalists, Catholics, Protestants, Hmong animists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. We'll learn about how long mourning lasts, how mourners act, where mourning happens, what special things take place and how mourners find comfort.

On your classroom wall there will be a big empty chart with spots for all the information in the grid. Read the headers for the rows and columns. The information for each cell has been placed on a color- and shape-coded card so that the class can sort the information by topic and religion. Older children will participate both by reading and placing the information into the table. Younger children will participate by helping fit the card into the right row and column, but the teacher will have to read or summarize the information on the card.

Once the table is filled in and the information shared, review by asking some questions like these:

- I wonder which was the longest mourning period?
- I wonder why Jews might choose to cover their mirrors during the period of sadness at home?
- I wonder if Unitarian Universalists can find comfort even if they don't believe in Heaven?
- I wonder which of these you find most interesting?
- I wonder if you'd rather mourn at home or somewhere else?
- I wonder why people make up rules around feeling and acting sad?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY THREE (GRADES 3-6) OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AFTER WE DIE

⌚ 15 minutes

Attached you'll find a handout about the potential environmental problems caused by current practices in embalming, interment and cremation as well as more sustainable alternatives to these practices. This activity may not be of interest or appropriate to 1st and 2nd grade classes but will likely be of great interest to 5th and 6th graders. Review the handout and ask some of the following questions.

- I wonder how we ended up with today's practices of embalming, burial or cremation?
- I wonder what you know about other historical or cultural practices around honoring the remains of the dead?
- I wonder how most Unitarian Universalists feel about these issues?
- I wonder which of these alternatives you find most interesting?

In response to the graphs illustrating people's feelings around funeral practices, you might even ask 6th graders if they'd like to go up to the Parish Hall and conduct a brief survey of 10 people to see how our congregation might compare to the respondents represented in the graphs and charts. The respondents in all cases were Americans over the age of 50.

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.*

	<u>How long does mourning last?</u>	<u>How are mourners supposed to act?</u>	<u>Where does mourning happen?</u>	<u>What special things happen?</u>	<u>How else do people cope with grief?</u>
Unitarian Universalists	Usually a memorial service happens on a day sometime after the death. It lasts about an hour. We don't have specific mourning rituals. Each family mourns differently.	We don't have rules about mourning. We expect the church community to take good care of the grieving family. Ministers and church friends will help the family plan and mourn.	Much mourning happens at home. We hold memorial services here at Unity Church, but the body or the ashes aren't ever brought here.	Memorial services include poems, music, candles, prayers and speeches where the ministers and family share memories and comfort.	Unitarian Universalists have different ideas about death, but all UUs get through mourning by being patient, asking for help and cherishing the good memories of a life well lived.
Our Catholic friends	Catholics have a funeral mass, which lasts an hour or two. Grieving lasts as long as the family needs.	They light candles and say prayers. They can share memories of the person who has died at the grave site.	The mass happens at church. Another service with prayers and speeches happens at the cemetery.	Candles are lit. The body is buried. Sometimes a meal and gathering (called a wake) is served at someone's home.	Our Catholic friends find comfort in the idea of heaven.
Our Protestant friends	Most Protestants have a day or two of visiting at a funeral home and then a funeral service that lasts about an hour. Grief lasts for as long as the family needs.	Mourners wear dark clothing. They say prayers and comfort each other.	Sometimes the services happen at a funeral home or a church or both.	Friends and family can make speeches called 'eulogies' to share memories and celebrate the life of the person who died.	Our Protestant friends find comfort in the idea of heaven.
Our Jewish friends	Jews 'sit shiva', meaning they stay together as a family in the house for 7 days. Official mourning lasts a year. Grief might take different amounts of time.	Sometimes mourners rip their cloths or wear black ribbons to show sadness. They cover mirrors with cloths and sit on low stools instead of chairs. They give up things that make them happy like books, tv and music.	Shiva happens at home. The family doesn't go outside at all. The funeral service happens at a synagogue or at the gravesite.	A special meal is served after the funeral. The family eats eggs, bread	Our Jewish friends find comfort in the idea of an afterlife with God.
Our Hmong friends	Hmong families host a funeral that lasts several days.	The family and friends share food and watch over the body.	The funeral happens at a Hmong funeral home or in someone's house.	A special instrument called a qeej ("kheng") is played.	Our Hmong friends find comfort in the idea of being with ancestors.
Our Muslim friends	Mourning officially ends after the body is buried or after three days.	Mourners go with the body to the grave. They are not supposed to yell or cry loudly, but accept what has happened.	Prayers for the person who has died are usually said outdoors and not in a mosque.	A woman whose husband has died may mourn for 4 months and 10 days.	Our Muslim friends find comfort in the idea of being in paradise and the idea that God is in control.
Our Buddhist friends	Mourning lasts for 49 days, with a prayer service every week.	The family will welcome monks to their home to perform the funeral. They share food and candles.	Prayers can be said at home, in a temple or at the gravesite.	Prayers and teachings are chanted.	Our Buddhist friends find comfort in the idea of reincarnation and the possibility of Nirvana, a peaceful state.
Our Hindu friends	Mourning lasts for 13 days.	The family cares for the body and then welcomes visitors. They focus on remembering good things about the person who has died.	Usually the family stays at home and people come there to visit.	Flowers are used to decorate photos of the person who died.	Our Hindu friends find comfort in the idea of reincarnation.

Mourners release doves after the funeral of a Catholic bishop.



A horse with no rider is part of a president's funeral.



An altar for the Day of the Dead, celebrated by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans.



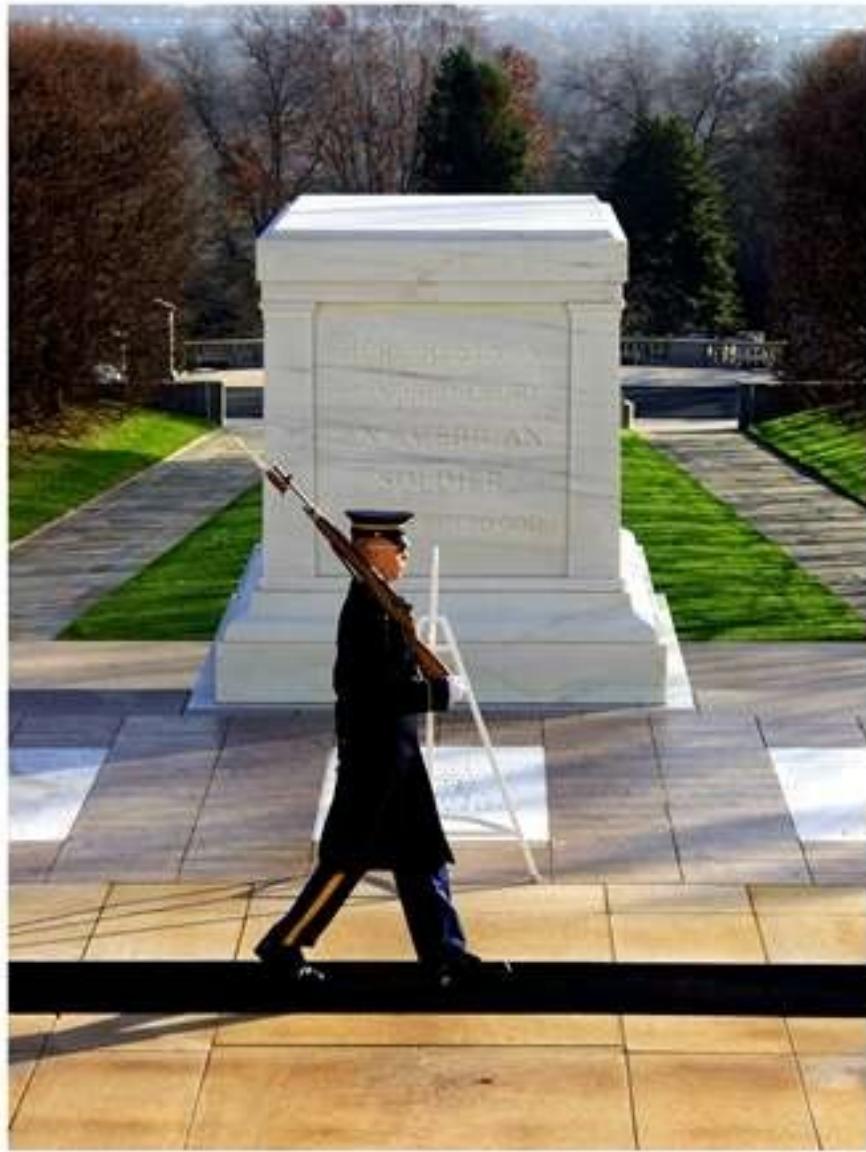


A FUNERAL JACKET FOR A Hmong funeral.

Friends and classmates grieving a girl who died in a bombing in Turkey.



A guard watches over the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier



A woman in Indonesia makes a shrine of flowers and candles.





A Hindu community has a funeral for many people killed by a violent attack.

Catholic mourners light candles and pray for people who have died.



People participate in a Buddhist funeral.





A special loaf of bread contains 24 coins and will be buried with a Russian man.



A memorial of light marks the spot where the World Trade Center buildings stood until September of 2001.

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

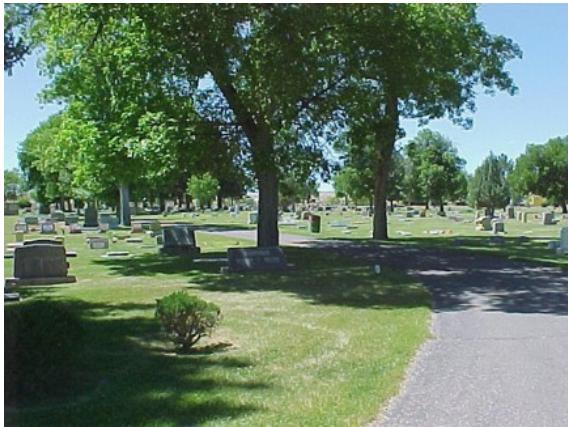
These children are capable of more abstract thinking and often are fascinated by the biology of disease. They may also think that death is a punishment for something they or someone else did wrong. They benefit from the same reassurance as younger children that they did not cause the death.

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

Environmental Problems Caused by Modern End of Life Practices

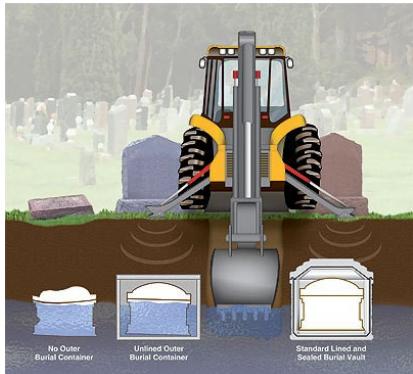
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What might some problems be with traditional cemeteries?

- There's only one use for traditional cemeteries: burying the dead. Maybe that's not the best use of our land in the future. There will always be more dead people and less available land in the world.
- The chemicals used in modern embalming aren't so good for the environment.

- It takes a lot of fertilizer, weed killer and gasoline to keep cemetery grass green and mown.
- The modern burial process doesn't allow the natural cycle of decomposition to return people's bodies to the earth. Some people find that process to be part of their spirituality.



- A lot of concrete—more than 1.6 million tons each year — is used in traditional cemeteries (for roads, and vaults). Making concrete is hard on the environment.
- Lots of other resources get used in caskets and can never be reclaimed. 90,000 tons of steel (as much as it took to build the Golden Gate bridge) get buried each year.

What about cremation?

- Cremation solves the problem of using up our land for more cemeteries.
- Cremation uses a lot of energy.
- Cremation also makes dangerous air pollution and contributes to climate change.
- One Swedish town uses the heat from their crematorium to heat public buildings!



Environmental Choices for End of Life Rites: Going Green

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Natural Preserve Cemeteries are a new, old-fashioned idea. These open spaces can be used for hiking and wildlife habitat. Biodegradable burial containers make sure that a person's body becomes part of the earth rather than remaining separate from it. Gravesites are marked with trees, boulders or patches of wildflowers rather than monuments. The land doesn't need constant maintenance to remain beautiful.

Natural Coffin Alternatives:



This woman took a class in Northern Minnesota and learned to make her own pine casket. While she's alive, she'll use it as a nice bookcase!



These Ecopod coffins are made of recycled newspaper and plant material. They'll biodegrade in time.



Seagrass can be woven into very attractive caskets.



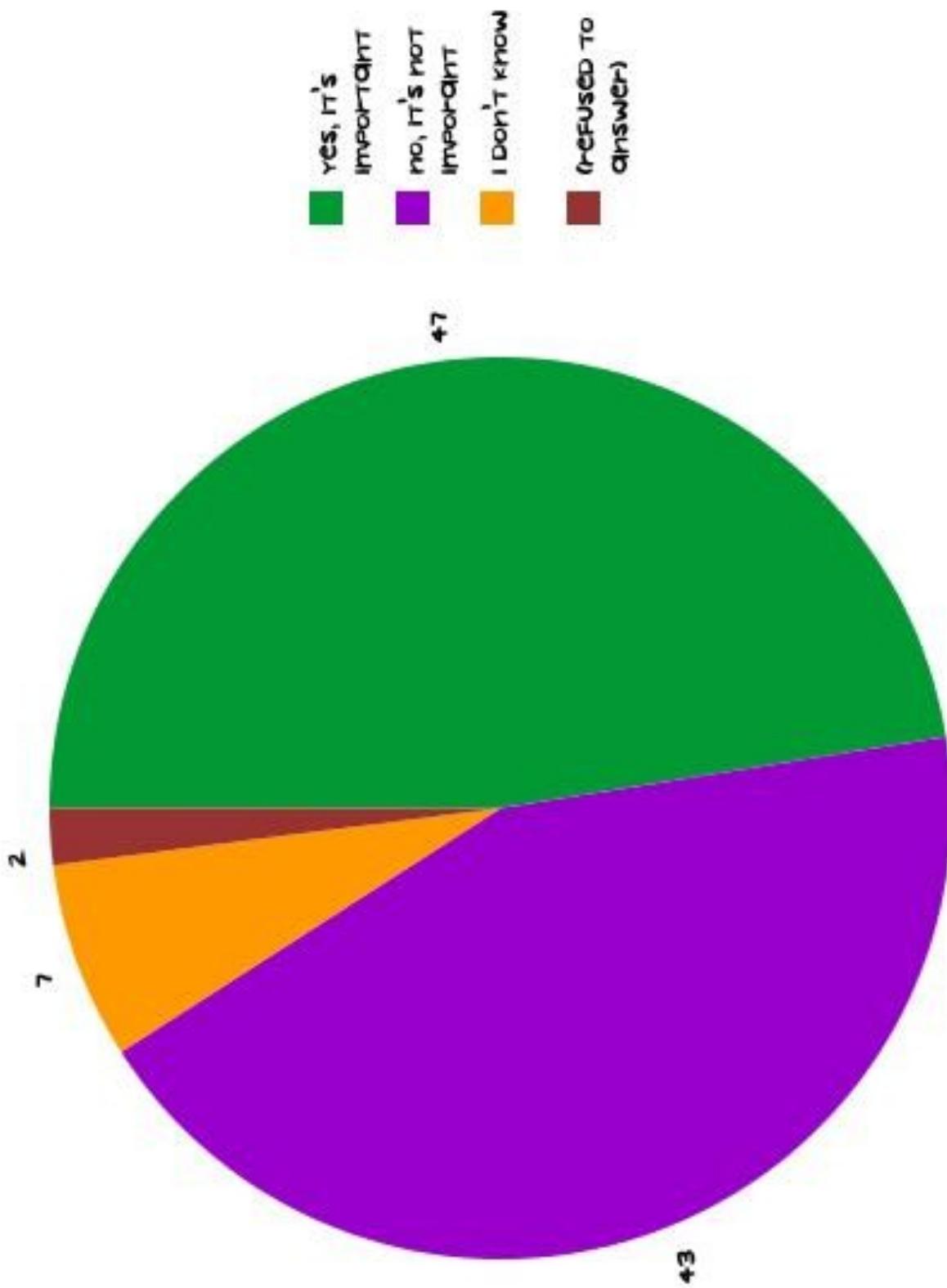
Basket-caskets are made out of woven willow.



People who choose cremation

can have their ashes buried in a paper acorn!

IS HAVING AN OPEN CASKET AN IMPORTANT PART OF A FUNERAL?



ALTERNATIVES TO CURRENT PRACTICES: IF FORMALDEHYDE WERE BANNED IN THE UNITED STATES, WHICH ALTERNATIVE WOULD YOU BE MOST INTERESTED IN?

