

JOURNEY IN.. YEAR THREE

THE NATURE OF GOD

ART

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- God is the Great Mystery
- While our hearts and minds help us to collect clues about God, part of God will always remain unknowable.

Lesson Materials

- Mystery images of the church building: photos of places and objects covered up by mats that mask most of the image
- A few prints of famous paintings (old calendars work great) with parts cut out
- Toothed art paper (6 x 8 or so)
- Black construction paper
- Scissors
- Oil pastels
- Smocks
- Fixative or hairspray (only spray outdoors!)
- Double-sided tape

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

As I plunge deeper, in fits and starts, seeking to penetrate the mystery of life and God, the mystery grows. It grows in wonder, power, moment, and depth. There are times, many times, when God is not with me, times of distraction, fragmentation, alienation, and brokenness. But when I open myself to God, incrementally my wholeness is restored. Perhaps that which I call God is no more than the mystery of life itself. I cannot know, nor do I care, for the power that emanates from deep within the heart of this mystery is redemptive. It is divine. Without hoping or presuming to understand it, opening myself to it, I find peace.

- Rev. Forrest Church

Wisdom and deep intelligence require an honest appreciation of mystery.

- Thomas Moore

The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.

- Albert Einstein

When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'that knowledge is for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well, George, that's more nearly your size.'

-George Washington Carver

Questions for reflection:

- How do you define your experience of and your relationship to Mystery?
- Where does 'what I know for sure' leave off for you and the unknowable pick up?
- Do you love to read and watch mysteries? Why?

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

Who likes mysteries? What makes a mystery a mystery? Can a picture be a mystery?

Here are two visual ways to think about mystery. Share both with the kids:

We can think of a mystery as a situation when we can only see one small part of the whole picture. When we don't see everything that we might need or want to see, then an image can be like a mystery. (Show the class a few mystery photos from the flipbook about our church and have them guess what the whole object or place might be.) Here are some images where we can only see a small part of the whole. Can you guess what the mystery object or place is?

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Another way to think of mysteries as something we can see might be to see almost all of an image but one part is missing. What could that part be? Show the class some famous paintings with pieces missing, cut out from the picture.

Can they guess what might be missing?

Wondering Together

- I wonder if God seems like a mystery to any of you? Why do you think Unitarian Universalists describe God as Mystery?
- How are these mystery images like the Great Mystery of God?
- When you think of God, do you feel like the Great Mystery is more like seeing just a little part of something big, or more like seeing everything but missing lots of interesting pieces?
- How does looking at a mystery image make you feel? Excited? Curious? Bored? Worried that you won't figure it out? How else?

**PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE
MYSTERY ART**

🕒 10-15 minutes

Today, the class will use oil pastels to create art that has a little bit of mys-

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

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tery to it. You can make a drawing and then choose your kind of mystery: either by cutting out some mysterious spaces, or by covering up everything but one part, just like one of our two examples.

Provide oil pastels, smocks and paper (of manageable size to avoid the kids' being intimidated by having to fill up a 12 x 18 white space in 30 minutes) to each child.

- For kids who chose to do a close-up of a mystery object: Provide them with a selection of still life subjects collected from around the church, some magnifying glasses and some 'composition frames': pieces of black construction paper or card stock with rectangles cut out to help them frame the detail that they'd like to draw.
- For kids who choose to do a complete drawing and then cut out some mysterious missing pieces: Provide them with time and materials to draw and then some scissors to select and cut out a negative shape or two. If it can be done safely, small pieces can be burned in a chalice-shaped bowl so that the mystery pieces are literally unattainable.

Kids who choose this method might be at a loss for subject matter for their drawing. If they're not interested in a still life made from the church objects, You can suggest that they draw something they've learned about or seen in the universe that seems especially weird or mysterious. Maybe that might be deep sea creatures or the miracle of the seasons or dinosaurs or life on other planets. Encourage them to draw with lots of detail so that they have plenty of things to choose to make into a mystery.

Both types of drawings should be mounted on black cardstock using double-sided mounting tape.

Give the kids half an hour or so to work on their art. Be sure to watch the clock and allow time for clean-up. Provide a reminder that you'll be wrapping up and cleaning the materials a few minutes before drawing time is up.

Take time after clean up to share the art and ask a few more wondering questions.

Wondering Together

- So, do you think people who look at your art will be able to guess what the mystery is, or are you probably going to be the only person who knows?
- Why do you think that God is still a mystery to people?

- How did being an artist today make you kind of similar to God?
- Is God's being a mystery—something we can't see or know all about — a problem or a blessing?

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 2 minutes

Invite the class to sit in a circle for the closing. You can read the lines of the closing below and the children can respond in unison: *It's a mystery!*

Where did the Universe come from?

It's a mystery! (repeat after each question)

Where is the Universe going?

What is God?

Why does my brain keep wondering?

Why is it a Mystery?