

# JOURNEY IN... YEAR THREE

## THE NATURE OF GOD STORY

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

- Copies of the Quick-Solve mysteries attached to this lesson.
- Blank copies of the Mystery Mad Lib
- Pencil or pen
- Copy of *Hide and Seek with God*.

### 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

🕒 2-3 minutes

What is a mystery? It's something you solve, like a big version of a riddle. Who likes solving riddles? I have some riddles here but not the answers. Let's start with a riddle and see if we can solve it in less than minute:

What can you keep only if you have already given it to someone else?

What do you break every time you say its name?

Once our minute is up, we'll move on to our mystery stories, whether we've solved it yet or not, okay?

## PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE MYSTERY STORIES

🕒 20-25 minutes

Let's spend some time with some mystery stories!

- What is a mystery story?
- Who enjoys them?
- How do you solve them?
- Have you ever not been able to solve a mystery? What was that experience like?
- Can you define these Mystery Vocabulary Words for the class: detective, witness, evidence (clue), [for older kids: accomplice, deduction

### Solving a 5 minute mystery:

Lots of kids love a good mystery. We'll get our thinking caps on tight by solving a short mystery together. There are two different mystery stories, one for the younger grades and one for older children. You, the teacher, can select the one that you think is most appropriate for your group. Read the story aloud (or ask for a volunteer reader or two) and then discuss together to solve the mystery. The solutions to the mystery have purposefully been omitted so that the teacher isn't seen as the source of "the answer". It's fine to read the story more than once.

Both mysteries are from adapted from [kids.mysterynet.com](http://kids.mysterynet.com)

**TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON**

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**PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO  
MYSTERY MAD LIB**

🕒 10-15 minutes

When solving a mystery, you sometimes have to “read between the lines” and “fill in the blanks”. Sometimes parts of a story are missing and you have to use your imagination or your ability to reason to fill in parts.

A fun kind of fill-in-the-blank story is the Mad Lib. Lots of words are missing, so we have to supply them.

Let’s see what happens when we fill in the blanks of a Mad Lib about God’s Mystery. The Mad Lib is attached.

Before starting, remind the group that unkind or yucky words are not appropriate for our gatherings at church. As a behavioral management tool, make clear that you will only read the story if everyone agrees to use words that belong in our UU church.

**Wondering Together**

- Which parts of this Mad Lib ended up kind of right, in your opinion?
- Which parts did you find the silliest?
- Is it okay to be silly when we talk about God? How do you know?
- What blanks can you really fill in about God? Any adjectives fit? Any places?

**PRIMARY ACTIVITY THREE  
HIDE AND SEEK WITH GOD**

🕒 10-15 minutes

Read “The Mystery of God” from the book *Hide and Seek with God* (p. 29) out loud with the class.

**Wondering Together**

- I wonder if you think of God like a puzzle?
- I wonder what parts of the God puzzle you think are missing?
- I wonder, if God invited you to play Hide and Seek, would you?
- I wonder why there are parts about God that stay a mystery?
- I wonder how not solving the God mystery makes people feel?

**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?

**MYSTERY FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN  
(GRADES 1-2, POSSIBLY 3-4)**

The doors of Unity Church had been open only an hour when Andy stopped by the Parish Hall and noticed a new poster announcing a price increase on donuts. "I put the sign up the morning," the Director of Religious Education told him. "I have to raise my prices ten percent because we can't get donuts for the same price as last year. And *now* the church will have to use some of the profits to pay for a new lock for the Parish Hall door. Somebody broke it, trying to get in here last night. I don't know whatever for, unless someone was really desperate for a donut."

"Have you called the police?" Andy asked.

"No. Nothing was stolen." The D.R.E. led Andy to the door into the hallway. "See? I locked the door myself last night after I set up the donut table. Sat here and made my price change poster last night. Soon's I was done, I left it on the kitchen counter where we serve coffee. When I went out, I locked the door to the Parish Hall. The donuts weren't here yet, though, so whoever got in was stuck in here with nothing here to eat or steal."

Andy left the Parish Hall and wandered out to the front steps of the church. Chris and Taylor were showing each other the books they'd been reading. "Hey, did you hear that somebody broke the lock trying to break into the Parish Hall?" Andy asked.

"Nope," Chris said. "We've haven't even been in the church yet. Haven't talked to anybody." Taylor gestured to a book on the steps. "Hey, have you read the most recent Harry Potter book? I got it with my allowance and I read all the way to chapter 6 just this morning," Taylor said. "But now I'm starving. I've got a dollar left from my allowance. If the high schoolers are at the table in the Parish Hall, now, I'm going to get a nice sugary donut."

"Better get another dime from somewhere," Chris told him. "A dollar's not enough any more. As for me, I'm going to ask my parents if we can go get pizza for lunch after church."

"You both stay right here," Andy said. "I know which one of you broke that lock. You'd better think of a way to pay for it, because I'm going in and telling the truth to the Director of Religious Education."

**Who do you think Andy believes broke the window? How did Andy figure it out?**

**MYSTERY FOR OLDER CHILDREN  
(GRADES 3-6)**

Sergeant Dennis Morelli and Officer Agnes Young of the St. Paul Police were seated Wednesday morning at the Eller-Isaacs' kitchen table. The Reverends Eller-Isaacs, Rob and Janne, ministers of Unity church, poured everyone a cup of coffee and sat down.

"Perhaps, professor, you could describe the letter again," said the burly Morelli.

"As I have told you, sergeant," Rob replied, frowning, "the letter was written and signed by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1863. Its recipient was Henry Thoreau, his dear friend. Both were important figures in Unitarian Universalism. You will find the text of the letters in A writer from the UU World magazine visited my home last year and profiled the letter, including its location.

"As you know, our basement is nicely fixed up," Rob continued. "Until last week, the framed letter hung on my basement wall, just outside the door to the small bathroom. When I went down last Friday morning, I discovered that someone had removed the back of the frame, taken the letter, and inserted as a laughable substitute a wrinkled copy of a handwritten fake letter."

"And you owned the letter for how long?" asked Morelli.

"Nine years." said Janne, "We finally decided to donate it to the Library at the Harvard Divinity School and was going to hand it over in three weeks. We never got around to having it insured."

Morelli glanced at Young, who nodded a little nod.

"Your basement had three visitors last week, professor," said Young. "John Healy of Carney Furnaces came on Tuesday afternoon to clean your furnace. He has been with the company about five months. Ken Cantwell, who has been with the town water department for many years, stopped by on Wednesday afternoon to read your meter, as he does every four months. On Thursday morning, the tank of the toilet down there overflowed, and your wife, also the Reverend Eller-Isaacs, called in Russell McNutt, a local plumber, to solve the problem so she could finish writing her sermon."

"That's right. I was away at a conference all day Thursday. Janne was getting ready to preach on Sunday."

"Mr. McNutt was tried for petty theft six years ago, but found not guilty," noted Morelli. "Were any fingerprints were found on the frame that held the letter, Agnes?"

"No, sarge. And no one has tried to sell the letter."

"It couldn't be sold!" exclaimed Rob. "Everyone who knows anything about UU history knows that I was the owner of that letter. Someone just wanted to keep it in their private collection, I bet! The theft must have been arranged by a private collector who hired someone to get into my house and take the letter. Many people knew that I was about to donate the letter to Harvard, so the culprit thought that it was best to move sooner than later."

"I see." Morelli frowned in thought. "Well, there were no signs of forced entry. You always keep your house locked, professor? And you had no other visitors last week?"

"Correct on both points," Janne replied sadly.

"Does anyone else have a key to your house?"

"No."

"Any particular reason why you had your furnace cleaned now?"

"Well, we've had it done every two to three years, whenever it occurs to us. There are eight or nine companies around here that clean furnaces. I can never remember which one we last used, so I just picked one at random from the yellow pages. We made the appointment about two weeks ago."

"Reverend," said Young, "I understand that these men did their work on your furnace downstairs without supervision. Is that right?"

"Yes. Janne or I just showed them the stairs and let them do their jobs. I didn't have occasion to go down there from Tuesday morning until Friday."

Morelli smiled.

"Agnes, have any of the three shown a previous interest in historical documents or artifacts?" he asked.

Young smiled too. "Not a trace, sarge."

"Very well." Morelli pushed back his chair and stood up. "Thank you, Reverends. I think I know whom we need to question further to get this resolved. One of the people who came into your house was hired to steal the letter."

**Who did Sergeant Morelli suspect had taken the letter from the house? Was it the furnace workers? The plumber? The water meter reader? Did the Eller-Isaacs fake the theft themselves? How did Sergeant Morelli know?**

## Mystery of God Mad Lib

Four people were having an interesting discussion about God. Each person shared his or her theories about the Great Mystery.

The first person said, "God is like a \_\_\_\_\_ (**noun**). When I \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb**), I feel as if God is \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb ending in -ing**). I also find clues about the Great Mystery in \_\_\_\_\_ (**plural noun**) and \_\_\_\_\_ (**plural noun**). This makes me think that maybe God is \_\_\_\_\_ (**adjective**).

The second person said, "Well, it's maybe easier to say what I think I have found out that God ISN'T. I don't think God is a \_\_\_\_\_ (**noun**). Nothing I've seen makes me think that God \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb**) or \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb**). And I sure don't think that God is \_\_\_\_\_ (**adjective**). I've never found clues about God in \_\_\_\_\_ (**place**) or while \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb ending in -ing**).

The third person said, "God is definitely a mystery. I don't know why \_\_\_\_\_ (**plural noun**) are \_\_\_\_\_ (**adjective**) or why \_\_\_\_\_ (**plural noun**) don't \_\_\_\_\_ (**verb**). If I had to draw a sketch of God, I'd draw a \_\_\_\_\_ (**noun**). It seems to me that the mysterious God can be found in at least \_\_\_\_\_ (**number**) places.

The fourth person said, "Science gives me clues about God. I think God is like the \_\_\_\_\_ (**color**) and \_\_\_\_\_ (**color**) explosion of the universe when it was born \_\_\_\_\_ (**number**) years ago. Sometimes I wander alone in \_\_\_\_\_ (**place**) and \_\_\_\_\_ (**place**) looking for clues about the Mystery of God. All I know for sure is that I'll never know everything about God. I wonder if anyone ever will?

The End