

Spirit Play: Theodore Parker

Lesson Materials

- Laminated 'farm' underlay
 - Theodore figure (boy)
 - Father figure
 - Mother figure
 - Stick
 - Turtle
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Lay out the laminated underlay of the farm.

This is someone's home. What kind of a place does it look like? This is Theodore Parker's home and this is his story.

Once upon a time, nearly two hundred years ago, there lived a boy named Theodore Parker. He lived on a farm in the state of Massachusetts with his mother and his father and his ten older brothers and sisters. In the summer of 1814, when Theodore was almost – but not quite – four years old, he was finally old enough to go with his father for walks around their farm.

Place the figures of Theodore and his father at the start of the path, near the house.

Theodore walked proudly next to his father, taking extra long strides to keep up. They walked by the chicken coop where the black-and-white speckled hens scratched all day in the dirt with the strong toes, and the rooster would cry "Cock- a-doodle-doo" when he saw Theodore and his father go by.

'Walk' the two figures past the chickens.

They walked by the barn where the cows lived, and the calves would stop eating and stare at them with big brown eyes.

'Walk' the two figures past the barn.

They walked by the fields where the corn grew tall, and the wind fluttered the tassels of corn silk way up high.

Walk the figures past the field of corn.

They walked by the pond where the dragonflies darted, and the frogs would leap, ker-plunk, ker-splash, into the water.

Walk the figures past the pond.

They walked by the pasture where the sheep grazed, and the ewes would call out “Baa-baa” as Theodore and his father went by.

Walk the figures to the sheep.

They walked all around the farm every day, with Theodore walking a littler farther and a little faster every day.

Gesture up and down the path.

Now, one day, Theodore’s father stopped to look at one of the sheep, and he kept looking for a very long time. Theodore was bored. So Theodore put stones into little piles, but when he was done, his father was still looking at the sheep.

Then, Theodore was very bored, so he climbed on a rock and jumped off it, and he did this over and over again, but when he was done, his father was still looking at the sheep.

Place the stick in the hand of the Theodore figure.

So now, Theodore was very, very bored. So, he picked up a stick and started drawing in the dirt. But when he was done, his father was looking at a different sheep.

“Father,” Theodore asked, “may I please go home?”

His father looked at him and looked at him some more. Theodore tried to stand up very tall, because he was almost – but not quite –four years old. “It’s a long way back to the house. It’s a crooked path in some places.”

“I won’t get tired. I know the way,” said Theodore.

“Well then, off you go,” his father replied, smiling.

So, Theodore went walking, with his stick in his hand. He walked by the pasture where the sheep were grazing, and the lambs called out, “Baa-baa”.

Walk Theodore past the sheep.

He walked by the pond where the dragonflies darted and a frog went leaping ker-plunk, ker-splash, into the water. But then, Theodore stopped and turned around and went back. He had seen something different today.

Walk Theodore past the pond, but then turn him around and place him near the pond.

There on a rock on the edge of the pond, lay a little striped turtle, enjoying the sunshine and the fine summer day.

Place the turtle figure near the pond.

Theodore crept closer and closer, with his stick lifted high in his hand. He had seen other boys hit animals: squirrels and lizards and birds. Theodore had always been too little or too slow to hit anything, but this turtle was too slow to get away. Theodore lifted the stick as high as he could and he started to swing. *(gesture as if preparing to strike with a stick)*

“It is wrong!” Theodore heard a voice, strong and clear and he stopped, with his stick still up in the air. “Wrong!” said the voice once more.

(Look around) Theodore looked around. It wasn’t his father’s voice. It wasn’t his mother’s. It wasn’t any of his ten older brothers or sisters. It wasn’t the voice of a neighbor or even a friend. There was absolutely no one else around. Theodore dropped the stick. The turtle crawled into the pond with a ker-splish and a ripple and Theodore started to run.

He ran by the fields where the corn grew tall, and the wind fluttered the tassels of corn silk way up high.

Run Theodore past the corn.

He ran past the barn where the calves stopped eating and stared at him with big brown eyes.

Run Theodore past the barn.

He ran past the chicken coop where the rooster crowed every morning and the black and white hens stopped scratching in the dirt as he ran by.

Run Theodore past the chickens.

Place the figure of Theodore's mother at the end of the path.

He ran all the way home and straight into his mother's arms. He told her about the stick and the turtle and then he told her about the Voice. "Who was that?" Theodore wanted to know.

"Some people call it your conscience," said his mother, "but I call it the Voice of God. It guides us through our lives. If you listen to this Voice in your heart and obey, it will speak clearer and clearer all through your life, like the tolling of a bell, no matter how old you are."

"Even when I'm four?" asked Theodore. *(hold up four fingers)*

His mother smiled. "Even when you're four."

"Even when I'm five?" asked Theodore. *(hold up five fingers)*

"Even when you are five or six or fifty or sixty. But if you stop listening to this Voice, it will get quieter and quieter until you can't hear it at all."

Theodore grew up and he got to be four, and then five and six and seven and he always listened to that Voice, every single day. When he was all grown up, he became a Unitarian minister. All his life, he listened to the Voice and tried to do what was right. We can learn from him and listen, too.

Wondering Questions:

I wonder what part of the story you liked the best?

I wonder what part is most important?

I wonder where you are in the story?

I wonder if there is any part of the story that we can leave out and still have all the story we need?