



JOURNEY IN... YEAR ONE



THE NATURE OF GOD STORYTELLING

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- God, that of many names and beyond all naming, is one.
- Images of and paths to God are many.

Lesson Materials

- Copy of the Parable of the Blind Philosophers and the Elephant (attached).
- A suncatcher.
- A flashlight.
- Book about cathedrals, perhaps one of these:
 - Macaulay, David *Cathedral*
 - Schutz, Berhnard *Great Cathedrals*
- (For Extra Time) *The Everything Seed*, by Carole Martignacco

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

⌚ Ahead of time

Readings for you, the teacher:

"When the Jew, the Christian, the Moslem, the Hindu and the Buddhist open themselves in prayer, in meditation, to the transcendent mystery, going beyond the word, beyond thought, simply opening themselves to the light, to the truth, to reality, then the meeting takes place. That is where humanity will be united. Only through transcendence can we find unity."

- Bede Griffiths, quoted in *The Other Half of My Soul*, compiled by Beatrice Bruteau

All religions,
all this singing,
is one song.
The differences are just
illusion and vanity.

The sun's light looks a little different
on this wall than it does on that wall...
but it's still one light

- Rumi

Questions for your reflection

- What does the word God mean to you? Do you own the word's meaning or has it been stolen by 'illusion and vanity'?
- In what moments of your life have you touched the Oneness of the truth, the light?
- When was your last argument about the nature of the truth, the light – of God? Would you relive it? Was it a source of illumination or obscurity?

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- Younger children will need an introduction to the word ‘philosopher’. Give them a sense of its meaning, perhaps name a philosopher or two if they might have heard of them (Aesop). The word’s origins are Greek: *philo-* love and *sophy*-knowledge.
- You can make the story interactive if you choose by asking the children to guess at which part of the elephant each philosopher was touching.
- Younger students may not have a clear image of stained glass windows.

YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

GATHERING AND FOCUSING UNI-WORDS

⌚ 5 minutes

How many words can we think of that start with the prefix, “uni-”? List them on a blackboard or flipchart. What meaning do they all have in common? Let’s keep this in mind as we share in some stories together.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE “THE BLIND PHILOSOPHERS AND THE ELEPHANT”

⌚ 20 minutes

- Tell the parable of the Blind Philosophers and the Elephant. A story version is attached to this lesson. This story is best memorized and told in a variety of voices.

Wondering Together

- Do you think this story is true?
- I wonder how the philosophers could have learned about the elephant differently.
- I wonder why the philosophers (or people in general) argue instead of listening? Do you have a story about a similar argument from your own life?
- When you hear someone say the word “God”, I wonder what ideas come into your mind or your heart?
- Do you think it’s possible to be an expert about God?
- Do you know anyone who thinks about God differently than you do? What happens when the two of you talk about God?
- What if *you* were with the philosophers and you could *see* the elephant? Could you help them?
- I wonder how this story might be like thinking about God.
- I wonder what you’ll remember about this story later on.
- If people were arguing about God, I wonder how you could be helpful them?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO GUIDED IMAGERY STORY: THE CATHEDRAL

⌚ 15 minutes

**YOUR FIELD
EXPERIENCES:
FEEDBACK AND
NOTES**

- Share a book with color photos of cathedrals, especially ones with stained glass windows. Using the suncatcher show the children what happens to light when it passes through the colored glass. Have them catch a flashlight's beam on their hands and then the same light through the suncatcher. You might ask predicting questions to get the children thinking.
- Ask the children to find a comfortable position that doesn't invade the personal space of another child. Explain to them that you're going to describe something to them—it's not a story with a beginning, middle and end, it's a painting for their minds, made out of words. Their only task is to imagine the scene that the words are creating. If they want, they can close their eyes while they imagine.
- Read the guided imagery section to the children.
- Allow for a quiet moment after finishing before you ask the children to open their eyes. If they'd like to share how the imagery made them feel, invite them to talk about it.

**EXTRA TIME?
*THE EVERYTHING SEED***

⌚ 15 minutes

If the primary activities don't take as long as expected, or if you feel you have extra time, this storybook is an exquisitely illustrated tale of the One Source from which all the universe has sprung. If your class includes readers, invite them to take turns reading a couple pages each.

The Everything Seed, by Carole Martignacco

GATHERING AND REFLECTING

⌚ 5 minutes

- Ask the children if they remember what the prefix “uni-” means.
- What might the word ‘Unitarian’ mean when we think about God?
- Do all Unitarians think about God the same way? How is that like the picture we imagined of a cathedral? How is that like the idea in *The Everything Seed*?

**YOUR FIELD
EXPERIENCES:
FEEDBACK AND
NOTES****CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING**

⌚ 5 minutes

- Gather the children in a circle or cluster. Holding hands is a warm gesture of connection; do so if the children feel so inclined. Allow for a moment of silence.

You can ask the children to listen to your reading of this meditative blessing. They can repeat the words in their mind, or aloud, or you can ask them to read it from a written copy in chorus with one another.

*May we remember that we are already One.
May we remember that God is already One.
May we each travel our path to the One Truth
with hope and respect for every other traveler.*

May it be so and Amen.

“The Blind Philosophers and the Elephant” an Indian folktale

Once there were six blind philosophers who loved to sit and think. When they weren't thinking, they were arguing. Each of them had different ideas about the world and each of them was convinced that he was right and the other philosophers were wrong.

One day, while the philosophers were arguing, an elephant came lumbering out of the forest. The philosophers had never met an elephant before, but they had heard their trumpeting from far off. This elephant made a deafening noise and stopped at the edge of the village to eat some leaves from the trees.

One of the philosophers cried out, “It's an elephant! Let us go learn about it! We will be experts about elephants!”

So, the philosophers, who could not see, approached the elephant slowly but with a great deal of excitement, walking with their canes, stretching their hands out in front of them.

The first philosopher reached the elephant's knee. He felt the rough skin and wrapped his arms around the thick, solid leg. He called out to his fellow philosophers, “I've got it! I know what elephants are like! They are very much like trees!”

But another philosopher, who had reached up and grabbed the elephant's tail, called back, “No, you are wrong!” He felt the tail up and down. “Elephants are exactly like ropes.”

Standing with his hands against the elephant's broad side, a third philosopher said to the first two, “You are both fools. An elephant is like a wall.”

By that time, the other philosophers had reached the elephant. The fourth one had reached up and felt the elephant's ear flat ear flapping back and forth at the flies. He said to his companions, “You don't know what you're talking about. Anyone can see that elephants are the same as fans.”

The fifth and sixth philosophers were standing near the elephant's head, reaching up with their hands. One grabbed the elephant's squirming trunk and exclaimed, “I am an elephant expert! The elephant is very closely related to the snake.”

The last of the philosophers called out to his friends in a worried voice. “You are all wrong and we are all in danger,” he said, feeling the pointed tips of the elephant's strong ivory tusks. “The elephant is a weapon like a spear!”

The philosophers were alarmed. A weapon! As they hurried away, canes tapping, they agreed that the villagers should be warned against exploring elephants for themselves. The philosophers would simply have to tell everyone about elephants and the people would just have to take their word for it. But each philosopher had a different idea about the elephant they had encountered. They argued and argued about who was right, about who was an expert.

They never realized the whole truth about elephants.

“The Cathedral”
Guided Imagery for Young People

Adapted from *A Chosen Faith* by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church

Imagine that you've fallen asleep somewhere, anywhere. It doesn't matter where you fell asleep because when you wake up, you're somewhere completely different, somewhere new. It's cool and a little bit dark, at first. Feel underneath your arms and legs — it's cool, hard stone. If you sit up and look around, your eyes will get used to the dimness and you can see around you. You're inside a great, stone building that feels like a church — it must be a cathedral. Look around. The walls aren't far away, but they go up and up and up; the walls are so tall that you can only barely see the ceiling in the darkness. It's not frightening; it feels safe, like home, only you're curious about it because this is the first time you've been here.

In your imagination, stand up and stretch. Do you hear voices? Yes, there are people whispering, so you walk toward them. The whispering gets louder and clearer and sometimes you hear some of the people singing. There must be people in here with you, lots of people. Now you can see that there's some light coming into this cathedral. The closer you get to the other people the brighter the light becomes. The light is all different colors, warm and glowing. Where is the light coming from? You look up and see that the light is coming from outside the cathedral. It's bright like the sun and it passes inside through great big colored windows. Stained glass windows, like huge suncatchers. With your eyes, you follow the colored beams of light to the floor, where it makes colorful patterns on the stone. People are standing in the pools of light, holding their hands out to catch the colors.

There are a lot of windows here, each of them different. You notice that some of the windows have pictures in the colored glass. One picture is of a tree; green light shines through its leaves. Another picture is of a man sitting quietly, pink and white flowers are blooming around him. Still another shows a picture of a man holding a sheep very gently in his arms. You walk from window to window, looking at the beautiful glass. Some have no pictures at all, just beautiful colors and shapes. Many of the people around you seem to have found a window that they like; they stay near it and feel the warmth of the sun coming through its glass. Other people seem to be looking for a window that they want to stand by.

You come to a window that you like very much. Look at it closely. The colors are especially beautiful to you. What colors are they? When you look at it, you might see patterns, maybe a picture. If you hold your hands out, the light plays on them and you feel very happy. Everyone in the cathedral is grateful that outside, the one sun is shining, lighting up the many different windows.

Maybe next time you visit this cathedral, you'll look for a door, so that you can go outside in the sunshine.