

GRADES 1-3

EXPLORING UU PRINCIPLE 1

Unitarian Universalists express faith in our actions and behaviors. Below is an adapted version of the Faithful Journey's curriculum to guide children as they explore one of the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism and begin to develop an understanding of how our beliefs translate into action.

The original lessons for this principle may be found here:

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session3>

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session2>

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Print out of Children's Version of UU Principles (with Adult version on backside)

Picture or video of Christopher Reeve

NOTE FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Use the story of Unitarian Universalist Christopher Reeve to examine our first Unitarian Universalist Principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person. (Children's version: We believe each and every person is important).

After a fall from a horse, Reeve went from being an active, athletic man who portrayed Superman on-screen to losing the ability to move his body below the neck. Reeve went on to live a different kind of heroism as an advocate for research and support to help people with spinal cord injuries. He spoke to Congress and many other audiences. He founded the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, which funds research on spinal cord injuries and offers grants to improve the lives of people who have become disabled.

Christopher Reeve's story serves as a springboard to issues of inclusion as children are guided to reflect on the ways we affirm the worth and dignity of every person.

EXPLORATION

INTRODUCTION & CHALICE LIGHTING:

Explain that as you start this exploration, you want to make sure everyone is on the same page and to do that, you'd like to take a minute and light the chalice. This is a way for you all to connect and get a bit of centering.

Life is a gift for which we are grateful. We gather in community to celebrate the glories and mysteries of this great gift.

Show children the print out of the Unitarian Universalist Principles (children's version). Explain that you would like to spend some time exploring these principles and what they mean. (In your own words, you might explain that most UUs believe a commitment to these principles is an important part of being a UU and making the world a better place. You might explain how that translates in your life – do you actively try to follow them?). Explain that together, you'd like to find ways for you all to take action based on the principles, since you believe they are important.

The principle you'll be exploring is: Principle 1: We believe each and every person is important.

Unitarian Universalist Principles, Children's Version

1. We believe each and every person is important.
2. We believe all people should be treated fairly.
3. In our congregations, all people are accepted and we learn together.
4. We believe each person is free to search for what is true and right in life.
5. Everyone deserves a vote about the things that concern them.
6. We believe in working for a peaceful, fair, and free world.
7. We believe in caring for our planet Earth and every living thing that shares it with us.

STORY/DISCUSSION

Show the pictures of Christopher Reeve and explain that he was an actor who spoke out for the rights of disabled people after he was injured in an accident.



(<https://www.rogerebert.com/mzs/30-minutes-on-superman-1978>)



<https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/features/reeve.htm>

A Different Kind of Superhero — Christopher Reeve

It was a hot, muggy morning. Christopher was not sure he really wanted to be out riding in a competition. His thoroughbred horse, Eastern Express, seemed a bit off, as if maybe he would rather be grazing in the field than doing the demanding work of running and jumping with a big, muscular man on his back. Maybe, Christopher thought, it would be nicer to take the kids sailing today, where there would be a cool breeze. "Well," he thought, "I'm a lucky man to be able to choose between riding and sailing."

In fact, plenty of people watching Christopher that day thought the same thing. He was many people's idea of a superhero. He was the actor who played Superman in the movies and, in real life, he fit the part: handsome, strong, always striving toward a goal, chasing his best time, or learning a new skill.

And then, in an instant, everything changed. Eastern Express balked at a jump, sending Christopher crashing to the ground. When he woke up in the hospital, Christopher couldn't move his hands or feet. He couldn't even breathe without the help of a machine. Although doctors could repair his neck, they could not fix the injury to his spinal cord. Now Christopher's brain was unable to communicate with most of his body. Even though he still had all his strength, intelligence, and willpower, there was simply no way for him to move any part of his body below his head.

Despair washed over Christopher. If he could not do anything, could not be useful to anyone, why not put him out of his misery, like they did with horses that were injured too badly to walk again? "Maybe," he said to his wife, Dana, "we should just let me go."

But Dana spoke words that helped start him on the road toward his new life: "But you're still you. And I love you."

Of course, Christopher Reeve had never actually been able to leap tall buildings in a single bound, but he had been a tremendous athlete. He had always liked a goal, a challenge, something to work for. Before his accident, Christopher's challenges involved acting, directing, and sports. Now his challenges were different. Now it took all his strength and determination to

sit up in a wheelchair and steer it by puffing on a straw.

His heart ached with all he had lost. He might never again be able to hug his wife and sons or ride a horse or sail. But he realized he still had a lot — the love of his family, and money and fame from his career. Christopher decided to use everything he still had to work for a new goal. As always, Christopher Reeve dreamed big. He hoped there might be a cure for spinal cord injuries, not just for himself, but also for many thousands of others whose lives had changed when their backs or necks were broken. He and his wife set up the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. They asked people for money to help pay scientists to research a cure. Then, Dana realized how lucky they were to be able to afford a ramp into their home and a big van that could fit Christopher's wheelchair. They collected money to help pay for ramps and other helpful things, so more people with spinal cord injuries could also have them.

Christopher realized that, even though he could no longer use his arms and legs, he had a power that many people do not. He was famous. People thought of him as Superman. Now he could really be a hero, not by flying through the air to rescue people, but by speaking up. Because he was famous, people would pay attention. They would listen, and they would want to help.

It wasn't easy. Christopher didn't want people to feel sorry for him. He didn't want to be embarrassed if he could not use his mouth to speak well, or if his body, as sometimes happened, jerked around without his control. But he knew this was a special chance to use the power he had and make the world a better place. So Christopher started speaking. He asked Congress to support stem cell research that might lead to a cure for spinal cord injuries. He asked groups of people to get involved and donate money. He talked with others who had experienced injuries like his. He even spoke, on television, to millions of people during the Academy Awards, showing everyone that, although his abilities had changed, his heart and his soul were strong and capable.

A writer for Reader's Digest magazine interviewed Christopher Reeve near the end of his life, in 2004, and asked him why he had joined a Unitarian church. He answered, "It gives me a moral compass. I often refer to Abe Lincoln, who said, 'When I do good, I feel good. When I do bad, I feel bad. And that is my religion.' I think we all have a little voice inside us that will guide us. It may be God, I don't know. But I think that if we shut out all the noise and clutter from our lives and listen to that voice, it will tell us the right thing to do."

Christopher Reeve showed what a real-life hero is: a person who listens to the voice inside them, and acts when that voice tells them the right thing to do.

The story presents an example of someone acting based on our first Unitarian Universalist Principle, the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Christopher Reeve not only rediscovered his own inherent worth and dignity after becoming a quadriplegic in a devastating accident, he also worked tirelessly for others with spinal cord injuries, reminding both the general public and lawmakers that people with disabilities have no less worth and dignity than anyone else.

Take a few minutes to discuss this story, using the questions below:

- Have you ever experienced being left out of an activity because you weren't physically

able to participate? How did that feel?

- Have you ever changed a game or other activity to make it possible for someone else to participate?
- What do you think makes someone a hero?

ACTIVITY: DESIGN A SUPERHERO

Tell children: in the movies, Christopher Reeve portrayed Superman, a superhero who was "Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound." There are dozens of superheroes in popular culture, with a variety of superpowers. Ask the children to name aloud some superheroes and their powers.

Then say:

- Of course, Christopher Reeve wasn't really a superhero. In real life, he was just a person like you or me, who chose to use his human powers to make the world a better place.
- If you were going to design your own comic book superhero who would make the world a better place, what would that hero be like?

Allow some responses.

Then say:

Most comic book superheroes have powers that help them win at fighting. Perhaps our superheroes could have super powers that could make the world a better place without fighting. What sort of actions might make the world a better place, without involving physically fighting? Invite the children to draw pictures of their own imagined superheroes. Ask them to include information about the powers they use to make the world better.

EXPLORE THE TOPIC FURTHER

Talk about...

As Unitarian Universalists, we want to treat every person in a way that shows we believe they have inherent worth and dignity – as if they are important. Discuss ways the members of your family show respect for one another and for other people. You may wish to play a game where one person suggests the name of someone you all know – the postal delivery person, an adult family friend, a teacher, one of your child's friends and all contribute ways you show that person you consider them important and worthy of respect.

Do members of your immediate or extended family have disabilities? To include them fully, what actions do you or could you take? For instance, have you built a ramp so a wheelchair-user can visit your home? Are there people to whom children may need to talk more loudly or clearly? Do you need to make sure you are facing people who are hard of hearing when you talk with them? Identify the personal agency each of your family members does or could use to honor the inherent worth and dignity of every person through inclusion.

Try...

Pay extra attention to times when your child shows respect for other people through acts of

kindness and consideration. Point out instances of your child acting faithfully, that is, in a way that reflects the Principle of inherent worth and dignity. Your child will have the opportunity to share these actions with the Faithful Journeys group next time we meet.

There are many kinds of abilities and disabilities. Explore together the particular gifts members of your family may have, such as being good at music or sports, or being good with language or writing stories. How do you share these gifts with the world? Everyone also has areas in which they struggle, from a poor sense of direction or a tendency to misplace items to learning disabilities that make it difficult to read or do math. How does your family help each other overcome or live with your limitations?

Make it a daily ritual to express your unconditional love to your child. You might say, "I love you always and forever, no matter what." Be sure to say this even (or especially) when you have been angry at your child. You can say, "I am still angry at you, but that doesn't change the fact that I love you always and forever, no matter what."

Watch...

the 1978 film, *Superman: The Movie*, starring Christopher Reeve, as a family.

Play...

"Another Way Relay". Ask each family member to come up with a task for another family member to complete without using the ability that would first come to mind.

For example:

- cross the room without using your feet
- pick up a slip of paper without using your hands
- communicate instructions without using their using your voice.
- pass a ball from person to person without using hands
- use pictures rather than words to convey an idea.

"Darling, If You Love Me, Won't You Please, Please Smile?" To play, one person asks another person this question. Without smiling at any point, the second person has to answer, "Darling, I am terribly sorry. I will love you forever but I just can't smile." The first person can attempt to get the second person to smile or laugh by making funny faces, telling jokes, or using other methods that don't involve physical contact. If the second person does not smile or laugh, they win. If you are playing this as a small group and the second person smiles before finishing the complete statement above, they become "it" and must now ask someone else the question while trying to elicit a smile.

SOURCE:

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