

GRADES 1-3 EXPLORING UU PRINCIPLE 7

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/session14>

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session15>

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

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

Large, shallow dish filled with water

Globe or world map

Picture of change the world kids

NOTE FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Use a story about the Change the World Kids to examine our seventh Unitarian Universalist Principle, respect for the interdependent web of all existence. (Children's version: We believe in caring for our planet Earth and every living thing that shares it with us.)

In the story, a group of children form a group to work together to protect many different parts of the interconnected web of all life. When they learn about problems in the world, the Change the World Kids think of ways they can act to make a difference.

The story serves as a springboard for discussions about how we can protect life on our planet.

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 7: We believe in caring for our planet Earth

and every living thing that shares it with us.

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

Unitarian Universalists believe our world is like one big web we share with all the plants and animals and people that live on Earth. If the web is so big, how can one child or even a group of children help take care of it? That's what our story is about.

The Change the World Kids (Thanks to the Change the World Kids, Meg Miller and Phyllis Arata-Meyers for information and permission to tell their story)

(Place a large, shallow dish filled with water in front of you, where children can see it. Place a globe or world map within your reach.)

Phebe and Nika were two girls, both eight years old. Sometimes they heard about bad things going on around them in the world – things like terrible wars where people would die, or earthquakes that would shake the ground and destroy people's homes. They wanted to help. But they weren't sure what kids could do.

They decided to talk to the kids in their congregation, the North Universalist Chapel Society in Woodstock, Vermont. This was the beginning of the Change the World Kids – a group of children who work together to protect many different parts of the interconnected web of all life. When they learn about problems in the world, the Change the World Kids think of ways they can act to make a difference. They learned there is plenty kids can do to help.

The Change the World Kids are an action club. Their motto is: "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something."

(Repeat the motto, slowly, so children can listen carefully to it: No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.)

Nika, Phebe, and all the other Change the World Kids learned about the ripple effect. They learned when one person takes action, even in one small way, that action can send ripples into the world around us, just as water ripples in a lake.

(Indicate the dish filled with water.)

Watch the surface of the water. When I poke my finger in it, you can see the ripples all around. Demonstrate this. Pause and let the water settle. Repeat until all children have seen the ripples. In Vermont, where the Change the World Kids live, many had bird feeders in their backyards. The birdfeeders attracted beautiful songbirds. When Vermont got very cold, birds migrated south, to warmer places for winter. One springtime, a couple of Change the World Kids noticed fewer birds came back to their birdfeeders after the winter. They wanted to know: What had happened to the birds?

A scientist told the Change the World Kids about endangered species – animals that might become extinct if nobody helped save the natural woods and forests and oceans the animals needed to live. The children learned that the birds they saw in Vermont in the spring and summer were losing their winter homes in Costa Rica, because people were cutting down trees. People in Costa Rica wanted the wood to build new homes. Or, sometimes they wanted to cut the forest to make more pastureland to feed beef cattle or to grow crops. But the trees were already being used as homes – by the birds. The children learned that tropical birds, like the three-wattled bell bird, will not even fly over land that has no trees, and when northern birds migrate for food in the winter and find none, they die.

What could the kids do? The problem was happening thousands of miles away, in Costa Rica.

(Point out Costa Rica on the globe or world map. Point out Vermont.)

How could the kids help? Vermont was so far away from Costa Rica, and the kids were just kids! I will give you a hint. Watch the water again.

(Indicate the dish filled with water. Poke the water surface. Repeat until all children have seen the ripples.)

The Change the World Kids remembered the ripple effect. Maybe they couldn't do everything to save the bell birds, but they could do something! They raised money to help start a tree nursery, Bosque para Siempre – that means “forest forever” in Spanish. They used some of the money they raised to buy land for a new habitat for the migratory birds. Some of the kids took trips to Costa Rica to help plant trees. They have replenished the forest with more than forty thousand trees that provide fruit and shade for many species of birds.

One time in Costa Rica, the Change the World Kids helped put tags on birds. Tags help scientists keep track of the birds and learn more about them. The Change the World Kids got to hold a red-breasted grosbeak and a wood thrush – both birds that spend part of the year in Vermont. In time, as the effects of their actions in Costa Rica are felt all around the world, like the ripple effect, the Change the World Kids know they will begin to hear and see more birds in Vermont again!

Nika and Phebe grew older. New children joined the Change the World Kids. Now the action club has teenagers and middle-schoolers from many different religions. They know that every action, no matter how small, can have ripples that spread around them. To help protect the

Earth, the Change the World Kids designed and sold reusable shopping bags. They made clotheslines so people could use the power of the sun, instead of electricity, to dry their clothes. The Change the World Kids do projects as simple as shoveling snow for an elderly person in their community and as complicated as raising money for children's schools and health care in Rwanda, where communities have suffered from war.

(Point out Rwanda on the globe or world map.)

With every action, big or small, the Change the World Kids prove what Phebe and Nika learned: No, nobody can do everything, but yes, each person can do something to protect the Earth and all life on it. Each action makes a ripple, and the ripples change the world.

(Show the two pictures of the kids doing their projects to protect the earth.)



The Change the World Kids helped a woman in Vermont who could not afford to repair her house. These two girls learned how to install a new membrane to fix the roof. Others helped fix the plumbing, insulation, and electrical wiring in the house and build a new bathroom, with the help of adult donations and supervision.



The Change the World Kids purchased a parcel of land to help reforest a migratory corridor in Costa Rica used by many species of birds. Here, a group from Vermont fills sleeves of dirt to plant fruit trees, at the Change the World Kids Vivero (tree nursery).

Ask children to describe the projects mentioned in the story. Hold up the globe or world map and point out Vermont, Costa Rica and Rwanda . Then ask:

- What does it mean when we say we are a part of an interdependent web of all existence?
- Is every place on the globe is connected? Is everything that lives in other places connected to us? Do you think the Change the World Kids would agree with that idea?
- I wonder, why did the Change the World Kids decide to form an action club?
- I wonder what their motto means: "No one can do everything, but everyone can do something." (Affirm that no one needs to feel they must help a big problem by themselves, but if everyone does a little, together it can help a lot.)

Our seventh Unitarian Universalist Principle reminds us we are all part of the interdependent web of all life. When we do faithful actions that follow our seventh Principle, we are respecting the web of life and helping protect everything that lives on the Earth we all share.

ACTIVITY: HOW TO HELP PROTECT THE EARTH

Ask the children how they can help protect the Earth and the living beings that share our interconnected web. Ideas include:

- Turn off lights when you are not using them.
- Ride a bicycle, walk, or take a bus instead of driving a car.

- Dry your clothes in the sun on a clothesline.
- Use cloth bags instead of asking for plastic bags at a store.
- Recycle used papers, bottles, and cans.
- Turn off the water in the sink while you brush your teeth.
- Turn down the heat or air conditioning in your house.
- Plant trees.
- Change your light bulbs to ones that use less electricity.
- Throw food wrappers in the trash instead of on the ground.

Make a plan to try some of those suggestions.

EXPLORE THE TOPIC FURTHER

Try...

Pay extra attention to your child's actions that help protect the Earth and reflect our seventh Principle. Enact energy-saving and other Earth-friendly practices in your home.

Our "daily bread" is a constant reminder that the interdependent web of life ensures our survival. Take a moment at mealtime to acknowledge the journey your food made to arrive on your plates. Thank the people who planted and harvested crops; the animals that gave their lives for your meat or fish; the insects that pollinated; the rain that helped crops grow; the people who packaged, transported, and labeled the food, stocked the grocery shelves and sold the food, and prepared and served the meal. Point out that we need all the Earth's life to survive. Ask each family member to name one way they took care of the Earth that day or will do so in the future.

Form two teams for a friendly green competition. Set a timer for a half hour and then race to list all the environmentally friendly items or practices you can find in your home. You may also want to search for non-environmentally friendly items or practices. Or, work as one team to beat the clock and find at least ten items for each list before the timer goes off.

Learn more...

Started by children in the religious education program of North Universalist Chapel Society (Woodstock, Vermont), the [Change the World Kids](http://www.changetheworldkids.org/) (at www.changetheworldkids.org/) is now a self-governing, 501(c)3-incorporated action club of middle- and high-school-age youth in Vermont's Upper Valley region.