

GRADES 1-3 EXPLORING UU PRINCIPLE 3

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/session6>
<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session7>

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

Print out of Children's Version of UU Principles (with Adult version on backside)
Picture of Sophia Lyon Fahs
Blank paper and crayons, markers or pastels
Music without lyrics (classical, jazz, world music instrumental, etc.)

NOTE FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Use the story of Unitarian religious educator Sophia Lyon Fahs to examine our third Unitarian Universalist Principle, acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth. (Children's version: We believe each and every person is important).

Educator Sophia Lyon Fahs had innovative ideas about children's faith development that inform our congregations' approaches to religious education today. And make it a lot more fun for children – games, activities, and exploration!

Sophia Lyon Fahs' story serves as a springboard to guide children to find their own individual gifts and interests as they explore a variety of spiritual practices.

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 3: In our congregations, all people are accepted and we learn together.

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 picture of Sophia Fahs and explain that she was a Unitarian religious educator who did more than any other one person to shape the way children learn in our congregations today.



Learning by Heart (by Polly Peterson)

"Mama, Mama, why do we just keep going and going and not going anywhere?" asked little Sophie. Her family was crossing the wide Pacific Ocean on a big ship bound for America . Sophie Lyon was an American girl, three and a half years old, making her first trip to America . She and her older brothers and sisters had all been born in China where their father was an evangelical Christian minister and their mother had started a school for Chinese girls.

When they made that long trip to America in 1880, Sophie's parents thought their family would go back to China after one year. But the plans changed, and Sophie never returned to China . As she grew up, her memories of China grew dim. But she hoped when she grew up she could go to

other countries as a Christian teacher, like her parents.

In college, Sophie joined a club for young people who also wanted to become Christian teachers. She met another devoted volunteer named Harvey Fahs. They began writing letters to each other, and made plans to travel and teach together. Six years later, they were married. But instead of traveling to another country, Sophie and Harvey moved to New York City. Harvey had a job, and Sophia Lyon Fahs taught Sunday school and continued her studies, excited about the new ideas she was learning.

Sophia and Harvey's first child was born in 1904. In those days, many women gave up their outside work after they became mothers. But Sophia was determined to keep learning and to keep teaching Sunday school, and she did. As it turned out, being a mother also helped Sophia learn! She learned about children from being with her own children and listening to their ideas and questions.

(You may want to pause here and solicit children's comments on ways children can teach adults.) When her children asked questions, Sophia tried her best to answer them. Her children had very interesting questions, like "Where does snow come from?" and "Where are we before we are born?" As she tried to answer her children's questions, Sophia learned how much she did not know! You might think not having all the answers took away Sophia's faith, but it was the opposite. She started to believe that to have a strong faith, finding questions you really care about is just as important as finding answers.

One time when Sophia taught a religious education class, she told a lively story about a real person who had been a Christian teacher in another country. The children were eager to hear the story and eager to talk about it. Like her own children at home, the children asked questions — the interesting kind of questions that let Sophia know they were thinking and learning.

*Sophia's ideas about religion changed over time. As a young person, she had thought Christianity was the one true religion and people all over the world should learn Bible stories. She grew to realize the Bible was not the only book with truth in it. She collected stories from all over the world, filled with truth and beauty to help children's spirits stretch and grow. She published the stories in a book called *From Long Ago and Many Lands*.*

In those days, when most adults thought children's minds were like empty jars to fill with learning, Sophia thought differently. She thought children were more like gardens, already planted with seeds of possibility for learning and growing. She thought a teacher's job was to provide the good soil and water and sunlight a garden needs to grow. In religious school, a teacher could help children grow in their spirit and faith.

(Ask: What do you think would help a child grow in spirit? What should church school teachers like us give you, to help you grow?)

Affirm or suggest: Teachers can give children a safe place to learn; tools, such as books and art supplies and music. We can show you how adults worship, sing, and celebrate together in faith. We can help you know when your actions are faithful ones, for goodness and justice. We can take you on field trips and tell you stories. But no one can give a child wisdom or faith or spiritual growth. These things can only grow from within. People learn by experiencing the world for themselves — by feeling their own feelings, and by seeing and touching and doing. That is what Sophia Fahs believed.)

When Sophia Fahs wrote about her beliefs, the president of the American Unitarian Association was impressed. He asked her to talk to Unitarian religious educators — people such as (insert

your own name(s) and/or the name of your director of religious education). Unitarian Sunday school teachers liked her ideas very much. And that is why, when you come here, we encourage you to see, and touch, and do ... and to ask lots of questions.

When she was 82 years old, Sophia became a Unitarian minister. Her own life was a great example of her belief that every person in a congregation should continue to learn and grow, from the smallest child to the oldest adult. Sophia Fahs lived a long, long time — 102 years — and she never stopped learning new things.

If she were alive today and came to visit us, Sophia Fahs would want to know about our experiences, like the ones we have posted on our Faithful Journeys Path, and how they have helped us learn and grow. She would want to know what stories we have read and how they have helped to awaken our spirits. She would want to know how we ask questions, seek answers, and learn from each other. Imagine how happy she would be to see us watering one another's seeds of spiritual growth in Faithful Journeys today.

Guide a brief discussion with these questions:

- What have you seen or experienced that made you feel, "Wow, that's really amazing?"
- Have you ever felt really excited to learn something? What was it, and what made it exciting?
- Do you need a teacher to tell you what things are amazing, or is that something you already know? How do you know? (Point out that our spirit is the part of us that lets us know when something is amazing.)
- What do you think "spiritual growth" might be? (You might suggest: more skill in seeing what's amazing, getting better at being quiet in yourself, figuring out your own answers to questions about what you believe, being ready to change your answers if you learn new information or have experiences that make your beliefs change.)

ACTIVITY: DRAWING TO MUSIC

One of the Sources for our Unitarian Universalist living tradition is transcending mystery and wonder that moves us to a renewal of the spirit. Mystery, wonder, and spirit are hard to define, and they may mean something a bit different to each person. Sometimes through art we can experience and express ideas we cannot express in words.

Tell the children:

We are going to hear some music. Listen with your spirit, as well as your ears. You can draw about how the music makes your spirit feel. Draw whatever comes to you to describe mystery and wonder. It does not need to be a picture of anything real; it can be a pattern or design or just the colors you feel like using. Let the music be the only sound we hear while we draw. Let the music speak to your spirit and your heart.

Assure them there is no right or wrong way to portray mystery and wonder, and affirm that they need not draw pictures of actual things in order to show a feeling or idea.

Allow them at least three minutes to draw. Then, stop the music and invite them to continue working on their drawings in quiet for a minute or two more.

Ask them to share their drawings and/or articulate what their spirits heard in the music or what feelings inside of them the images came from. Affirm all drawings as expressions of spirit. Focus on the process ("How did it feel to draw that?") and avoid praise, criticism, or interpretation of

the product. ("Is that a horse? Are those clouds?")

Ask them, "Do you feel you gave your spirit some exercise, doing this activity today?"

EXPLORE THE TOPIC FURTHER

Talk about...

The concept of spiritual growth. Ask your child, "What does 'spiritual' mean? What are some things that you personally do to attend to your own spiritual growth? How can you tell if a person is spiritually mature?" Listen to your child's answers, and share your own answers to the same questions.

Create...

A Zen Garden. The original Zen gardens were made by Japanese Buddhists to create an outdoor space that invited anyone who saw the garden to take quiet time to meditate. Zen gardens are usually quite simple, with gravel raked into neat patterns, and a few rocks, plants or grassy areas carefully arranged. Create your own miniature Zen gardens with boxes, sand and little objects you can arrange as you like. Use forks to rake the sand in any pattern you like. Arrange items in your Zen garden (small rocks, beads, etc.) and rake the sand around them as a kind of meditation, a way of getting quiet and focused.

Try...

For a week, be alert to ways you might help your child identify and take advantage of the ways they learn best. Is it easier to memorize spelling words while moving around? Does it help you to set grammar rules to a tune? Are math concepts easier to grasp with beans or kernels of popcorn to manipulate?

Sophia Fahs believed in the power of nature and science to inspire awe and wonder in children. Go on a family outing to an astronomy observatory, a nature preserve, an aquarium, or a natural history museum, keeping an eye out for those things that make you think "Wow, that's amazing!"

Affirm learning something every day with a ritual time, at dinner or before bed, for each family member to share something they learned. Identify and elevate spiritual along with intellectual or physical growth, sharing items such as "Today I remembered how important it is to really listen," or "Today I was able to practice being calm instead of losing my temper."

Do a walking meditation. The goal is not to walk really fast or really slow, but walking to be aware of yourself. Stand in a circle, and have participants extend their arms to each side without touching anyone else. Then (pausing as indicated) say:

Feel the ground under your feet, and the way your body adjusts to hold you upright.... Take a deep breath and let it out.... Again, take a deep breath, feeling it go all the way down into your belly, and then let it out.... Now, we'll begin walking. Remember, our feet are moving, but not our mouths. You can choose where you will walk, but make sure you're not interfering with anyone else. Have participants walk in a circle. Form a few small circles if you have room. Continue: *Feel the ground under your feet.... Is it rough or smooth, hard or springy?... Feel your legs as you walk, the way your muscles tighten and relax.... As you walk, relax your shoulders, and feel your head floating, your eyes guiding your steps, but not needing to focus on anything except what is right in front of you.... Notice how you are feeling.... Happy?... Sad?... Impatient?... Just*

notice the feelings and the thoughts as they come to you, and then let them go as you step past them.... Notice your breathing, how the air enters your body and then leaves again, as your thoughts enter your mind, and then you let them go.... Now gently come to a stop. Take one more deep breath and let it out, as we leave our meditation.

Practice mirror dancing to stay connected to another person — without touching at all. Divide into pairs, with each person in the pair designated as a "one" or a "two." The pairs will stand facing each other, fairly close, but not touching. When the music begins, the people who are "ones" will begin to move. The "twos" will mirror their movements, trying to look as much like a mirror reflection of the other person as possible. The goal of the "one" is not to trick the "two," but to move in ways that make it possible for both people to seem connected, mirror images of each other. After a couple of minutes, stop the music and tell the pairs to switch roles, so that the "twos" are initiating the movement and the "ones" are following.

When both sides have had a turn to lead a mirror dance, invite the children to reflect on their experiences. Was it harder to lead or to follow? Do you think you have more of a sense of your spirit when you move wordlessly, together with another person, or by yourself?

SOURCE:

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