

GRADES 1-3 EXPLORING UU PRINCIPLE 5

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/session10>

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/journeys/session11>

SUGGESTED MATERIALS

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

NOTE FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Use the story of Maria Cook to explore the fifth Unitarian Universalist Principle, the right of conscience and the use of democratic process. (Children's version: Everyone deserves a vote about the things that concern them.)

Maria Cook (1779-1835) was an early Universalist preacher, who responded to a trumped-up vagrancy charge by practicing passive resistance and, when jailed, preached Universalism to those who shared her incarceration.

Her story serves as a springboard to discussions about someone who held fast to the teachings of her conscience in the face of authority and found peaceful, dignified ways to express her views even when those around her tried to shut her down.

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 5: Everyone deserves a vote about the things that concern them.

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

Story of Maria Cook (by Janeen K. Grohsmeyer)

In 1779, more than two hundred years ago, a girl named Maria Cook was born in New York State. When she was born, the Americans were fighting the British in the War for Independence. The Americans wanted to have their own country where they could be independent and free to make their own decisions and say what they thought.

When Maria was four, the Americans won the war. They had their own independent country, and they were free to make their own decisions. When Maria was eight years old, Americans decided to have a constitution that promised freedom of religion and freedom of speech. The Constitution promised that, in America, people had the right to choose what to believe in and the right to speak out for what they believed.

Maria chose to believe in a religion called Universalism. People called it Universalism because that religion said God loved all people, everyone in the universe, no matter what. And since God loved everyone, eventually, everyone would be with God in heaven.

Other religions said only a few people went to heaven. The rest went to hell. And not just people who did bad things. In those religions, it didn't matter if people did good things or bad things. In those religions, people who did bad things went to hell, and some people who did good things went to hell, too. God chose only a few to come to heaven.

Maria didn't believe that. She believed that God chose everyone. She believed God loved everyone in the universe, even if they did bad things. After all, sometimes she did bad things, and her mother and father still loved her. God was her parent, too. That's what Maria believed, and so she chose to be a Universalist.

When Maria was grown up, she decided to speak out for what she believed. She started talking to people about how God loved everyone and everyone would go to heaven. She talked to everyone about Universalism. She talked to people in their houses; she talked to people on the streets; she talked to people in the stores.

And then she started talking to people in church. Not just after church or before church, but during church. She actually went up to the pulpit, where preachers go, and started talking about

Universalism.

Then people started talking about her. Because, back then, even though the Constitution promised all people would have freedom of speech, it didn't really work that way. Women weren't supposed to talk in public. Women weren't allowed to vote, which is a very important way of speaking out for what you believe in. Women were not allowed to give speeches and run for office, so no one could vote for them, either. And they certainly weren't supposed to be preachers. Some people thought it said so in the Bible.

But Maria preached anyway. She spoke out for what she believed in. She traveled from town to town, preaching about Universalism. Lots of people came to listen, even though she was a woman. She spoke so well that many people started believing in Universalism, too. In 1811, a Universalist church gave Maria Cook a letter of fellowship, and today we remember her as the first woman to be a Universalist preacher.

Not everyone liked having a woman preaching in their town. They didn't want her there. In 1813, she was arrested. The police said it was because she was a vagrant and didn't have a house to live in, even though she did, because she was staying with friends at their house. When the police came, Maria didn't argue. She didn't resist.

But she didn't help either. Maria refused to walk. The police had to pick her up and carry her to a wagon. They drove the wagon to Cooperstown. Then they had to carry her out of the wagon to go see the judge. Maria knew she hadn't done anything wrong. In the courtroom, she spoke out and told the judge that. She told him she didn't recognize his authority. She did not think he had a right to be the judge of her. She refused to answer his questions.

For that, the judge sentenced her to jail. Maria wouldn't walk there, either. The police had to pick her up and carry her to jail. And once she was there, guess what she started to do? She talked to the people in jail. She talked to the police; she talked to the prisoners; she talked to everyone she met about Universalism. She just kept right on preaching.

After a few weeks, the judge let her go. Maria continued traveling to different towns and preaching about Universalism. All her life, Maria Cook spoke out for what she believed in and did what she thought was right. She didn't yell. She didn't push or hit. She spoke out.

The Universalist religion Maria Cook talked about is part of our own heritage and part of our religion's name: Unitarian Universalist. Like Maria Cook, we believe every person should stand up and speak out for what they think is right and true. We believe everyone should have a say about matters that concern them. And no one should be put in jail for speaking out.

Guide a brief discussion with these questions:

- Have you ever stood up for what you thought was right, even when it was uncomfortable or difficult (for example, standing up for someone who was being bullied, or telling your religious beliefs to friends who you know believe differently)?
- How did it feel?

ACTIVITY: MOVE IT! VALUES CONTINUUM

Explain that you are going to play a game that gives each of you a chance to place your body where your beliefs are.

You will read some sentences that give two different choices about what someone might think is right or true. If participants agree with the first choice, they should go to the right side of the room and if they agree with the second choice, they should go to the left side of the room. Explain that if they think that the truth is somewhere in between, that is okay. They should place themselves in the spot that best shows what they think is true or right.

There is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions.

Begin reading the choices below: If you have time, invite participants to share after each question why they placed themselves where they did.

- Your friend just got a haircut that you think looks terrible, and asks you how you like it. Is it more important that your answer be (a) kind or (b) truthful?
- Your teacher at school tells your class something you're pretty sure is not true. Is it more important to (a) be polite and ignore the mistake or (b) tell the teacher and the class the information you think is correct?
- Two different friends have invited you to play at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday. One is a longtime friend and one is someone you know only a little bit. Is it more important to (a) be loyal, and play with your old friend or (b) be open, and play with your new friend?
- A friend says people who haven't accepted Jesus are going to go to hell. You disagree. Is it more important to (a) say nothing, to avoid hurting your friend's feelings or having an argument, or (b) share your opinion and say you think your friend is wrong?
- You are the line leader, and your group is going to the cafeteria. A friend cuts in the front of the line and says they are really hungry. Is it more important to (a) follow the rules and tell your friend no or (b) help your friend by letting them cut in front of other people?

After you have offered all the choices, regather the children in a circle. Ask how it felt when they stood with many others. How about times when they stood in a place with fewer children, or by themselves, and realized most people did not agree with them? Ask them if being together in Faithful Journeys made it easier or harder to figure out where to stand. Would they answer every question the same way privately, if they were thinking about it alone?

EXPLORE THE TOPIC FURTHER

Talk about...

Ask your child what they or others spoke about in the "I Object!" circle. Why did they object, and what did they tell the group they thought would be better? If your child did not share an objection, they can tell you how they felt about objections raised by others in the group. Share your own thoughts on something that really bothers you, which you think is wrong. Share why, and suggest a better course. Then, thank your child for allowing you to speak out.

Try...

If Internet petitions come to your email inbox or you encounter someone collecting signatures

for a petition, engage your child in conversation about the petition. Do they agree with the petition? Do they think the topic is important? How might the petition make a change?

As a family, participate in a protest march or vigil. Talk beforehand about what to expect. Help children understand the purpose and goals of the gathering. Point out signs, chants, and other ways the group or individuals speak out.

Any time your child begins to whine or complain, you can interrupt with a ritual declaration of "You object!" to which the child can respond, "Yes, I object!" You can follow up with the invitations we used in the "I Object!" exercise: Ask your child, "Why?" (Affirm rational arguments, even if you do not agree.). Ask, "What would be better?" and listen for suggestions of a different solution. The ritual does not assume that you will create a different outcome — bedtime can still be bedtime! It creates a way to affirm your child in speaking out and encourage them to practice rational discourse rather than whining.

Play....

Take turns finishing the sentence, "I wish" The sentences can range from the socially responsible (I wish there were no war) to the extremely silly (I wish there were a parrot on your head).

Learn...

A brief [biography of Maria Cook](http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/mariacook.html) (at www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/mariacook.html) is available online.

Explore the tradition of nonviolent resistance by reading a [brief biography of Gandhi](#) (at www.myhero.com/myhero/hero.asp?hero=gandhi), and *Martin Luther King* by Rosemary L. Bray (Rev. Rosemary Bray McNatt), illustrated by Malcah Zeldis (New York: HarperCollins, 1995) is an excellent picture book about Dr. King.

SOURCE:

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