

UU Identity & History

Lesson 3: Unitarianism Comes to America

2.21.2021

Objectives: History of Unitarianism in America.

Materials: Login to Unity's YouTube account, teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop,.

Time allotments: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select "gallery view" to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Zoom Icebreaker: Tree Pose (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

We say that Unity is a place where people lead lives of integrity, service, and joy. We say that at church we find and keep our balance. So in the spirit of yoga... who can stand on one leg the longest, in a tree pose, with their eyes closed??!



3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: "We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love."

Teacher reads: (from UU minister, Doug Kraft)

"Unitarian Universalism is not a rock to hold onto. It is a river to swim in. If you want a set of beliefs to hold onto, if you want rules to guide your life in all situations, if you want a foundation for a spiritual fortress, you will probably be disappointed with us. However, if you want to dive into the river and explore, if you think that what you experience and what you do is more important than what you believe, we may have something to offer. Life itself is more like a river than a rock... Unitarian Universalism is about learning to swim in the river rather than climbing out of it onto a rock."

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Begin a simple ritual for weekly check-in so that everyone's voice is heard (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Teacher talks: These words were written by Thomas Jefferson, a white founding father of the United States, to explain why the colonies needed to free themselves from England. Note: he was likely using “man” as short for “human,” but who he understood to be included in the category is a lively debate.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

Questions for discussion (keep it brief):

- What does he mean by truth?
- Are these truths similar to principles, like the UU principles we have explored?
- Jefferson says that a king or government doesn't have power over citizens, but is given power by the citizens. How might this idea translate when thinking about God as having power over people?

6. What is a Unitarian? Part 2 (10 minutes)

Teacher says: Last class, we talked about the first millennium or so of Christianity and mostly about Europe and the Near East.

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 3a (UU Timeline). Invite youth to read aloud the seven events in historical order. Stop screen share.

Teacher summarizes: The United States was not in existence for most of that history, and the First Nations people living in North America were certainly not affected by the argument over the Trinity. *So how did Unitarianism show up in America where it took hold and flourished?*

Today, we are talking about America and ideas/philosophies from the early to mid-1800s, before the American Civil War.

- As we learned from Thomas Jefferson's quote, many white Americans were questioning long-held beliefs about power and societal structures.
- Up to this point, Unitarians still thought of themselves as Christians. Today's focus will be on religious ideas of the earliest “breakaway” preachers, like William Ellery Channing and Hosea Ballou (a Universalist who influenced Unitarians).

- **William Ellery Channing** preached a famous sermon in Baltimore in which he put forth (1) the claim that Jesus might solely be human, not God; (2) the Bible might not be the inerrant (mistake-free) word of God; (3) the Trinity is NOT biblical as there is no mention of the “trinity” anywhere in the Bible.
- **Hosea Ballou** came along and said, “That’s right, there is no Trinity. Oh, and maybe there is no hell, either.” This was MAJOR news and prompted Unitarians in America to declare their “party line” on the Christian faith. We are going to make a broadcast of that major news.

7. Zoom skit (25 minutes)

- (a) Ask seven youth volunteers to read lines for the following characters: (1) a news anchor, (2) a field reporter, (3) Channing, (4) Ballou, (5) Emerson, (6) a modern Christian, and (7) Jesus. Invite other youth to act out the scene by making relevant facial expressions and sound effects throughout the skit.

Youth who are not interested in acting can draw pictures related to the story or be an engaged audience member.

- (b) **Screen share** lesson attachment 3b (Unitarian Skit).
- (c) Teacher reads character summaries and helps designate roles for youth.
- (d) Read through the skit in character!
- (e) Conclude with playing this brief video of the hymn “Morning Prayer,” which was written by Hosea Ballou who would sing while he traveled.

Screen share (with audio), start at 0:50:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8bBIC7QLMY&feature=emb_logo

Lyrics:

*Come, let us raise our voices high,
And form a sacred song,
To Him who rules the earth and sky,
And does our days prolong.
Who through the night gave us to rest,
This morning cheered our eyes;
And with the thousands of the blest,
In health made us to rise.*

*Early to God we'll send our prayer,
Make haste to pray and praise,
That He may make our good His care,
And guide us all our days.
And when the night of death comes on,
And we shall end our days;
May His rich grace the theme prolong
Of His eternal praise.*

8. Post-Skit Discussion: What “Unitarian” Means to Us Today (10 minutes)

- We are NOT a Christian denomination anymore (we will learn about how that happens in future lessons).
- What legacy of our Unitarian ancestors is left to us? What lessons can we learn from the faith they lived?
- How do you think most UUs today relate to the life story and teachings of Jesus?
- How do you think most UUs today relate to the idea of God? How might modern ideas be similar to/ different from earlier ideas?
- What might the word Unitarian mean to an atheist UU?
- Have you been a part of Unity’s Christmas pageant? Many UU churches don’t celebrate Christmas like we do. Why do you think we celebrate Jesus’ birth here at Unity?

9. Announcement: We have regular RE next Sunday!

10. Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*

11. Leave zoom breakout classroom: wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”