

Religions of Star Trek

Lesson 9: To Boldly Go and Transcend

Star Date: 4.18.2021

Objectives: To reflect on the intersection of Star Trek with our Transcendentalist heritage.

Materials: *Youth should have paper and a pen/pencil, teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop, login to Unity's YouTube account.

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: Imaginary Ball (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Pass the imaginary ball by calling out someone's name! Invite youth to unmute and stand up as able. Have a teacher or eager youth start by describing their ball creatively, then using their hands to "throw" the ball at the screen. "Pass" the ball by calling out someone else's name who is then asked to "catch" the ball, creatively describe a new kind of ball, and "throw" it to the next person. Go around until everyone's name is called.

3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together: *"We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love."*

Teacher reads: (from philosopher of knowledge, Immanuel Kant)

"Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life."

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Take the self-quiz: Are YOU a Transcendentalist? (10 minutes)

- (a) Ask youth to get paper and a pen/pencil.
- (b) Instruct youth to number their paper 1-20.
- (c) **Screen share** lesson attachment 9a (Are YOU a Transcendentalist?).
- (d) Read aloud each statement and have youth make a mark when they AGREE with a statement. Their total number of marks is their score.
- (e) Read aloud the score box and invite brief sharing.

6. The Transcendentalist Club (10 minutes)

Teacher's note: Transcendentalism is a challenging philosophy to pin down for anyone, encompassing many strands of thought, beliefs, and values converging at this point in history. It's helpful to think of as cluster of ideas! Please take time to review this synopsis so you can articulate in your own words.

Teacher summarizes: In the early 1800's the Unitarians (and the Universalists) in New England were defining themselves apart from the Calvinist Congregationalist churches that had a very low view of human beings as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The early Unitarians rejected that image and emphasized instead the capacity for human goodness and perfectibility. They read the Bible carefully and decided there was no such thing as original sin.

William Ellery Channing, in 1819, wrote a radical sermon called "Unitarian Christianity" that helped define Unitarians against the Calvinists. In the sermon, Channing had the audacity to say that the Bible was, "a book written for men, in the language of men" whose "meaning is to be sought in the same manner *as that of other books,*" stressing self-culture and self-cultivation supported by a life of learning, reason, and freedom.

When the children of these early Unitarians grew up, they rebelled against their parents' intellectual religion declaring it cold and lifeless, rejecting social conformity for a more direct experience of truth and beauty.

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 9b (Key Transcendentalist Ideas and Figures)
- Invite volunteers to read aloud the biographies and key points.

7. Core Tenets of Transcendentalism: (15 minutes)

Teacher says: The boundaries that these figures and ideas transcended can be organized into six core tenets.

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 9c (Six Core Tenets of Transcendentalism).
- Briefly, ask youth to share what each word/phrase brings to mind.
- Write down responses in each box and save document.

Questions for Discussion:

- What connections do you see between these values/tenets and Star Trek?
- What, if anything, was Star Trek seeking to “transcend”?

(Hint: Think about the opening lines or mission statement: “Space...the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, its continuing mission... to explore strange new worlds... to seek out new life and new civilizations... to boldly go where no one has gone before.” Racism... sexism.... superstition... war/violence... anthropomorphism... etc.?)

8. Transcending isn't as easy as it sounds! (15 minutes)

Teacher introduces: At an earlier point, the Borg had captured Captain Picard and assimilated him into the Hive Mind. Talk about conformity to the collective mind! Picard was eventually freed. In the following clip, the Borg have captured the Enterprise, taken the starship back in time to first contact with the Vulcans in an attempt to alter history. Picard seems set on fighting back, even at the risk of sacrificing his crew.

- **Share screen (with audio):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVd-U1sAwvo> (6:45 min)

[As reference help, here's part of the dialogue from the scene:]

[Lily tries to convince Picard to self-destruct the Enterprise, but he is defiant.]

Lily Sloane: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt your little quest. Captain Ahab has to go hunt his whale!

Jean-Luc Picard: *[offended]* What?

Sloane: You do have books in the 24th century?

Picard: *[understanding her meaning]* This is not about revenge!

Sloane: Liar!

Picard: *[agitated]* This is about saving the future of humanity!

Sloane: Jean-Luc, blow up the damn ship!!

Picard: NO! NOOOOOOOOO!!! *[smashes a display case in anger; Both pause, shocked]* I will not sacrifice the Enterprise. We've made too many compromises already, too many retreats. They invade our space, and we fall back. They assimilate entire worlds, and we fall back. Not again!

The line must be drawn *here! This far, no further!* And I will make them PAY for what they've done!

Sloane: *[looking at the broken remains of the Enterprise-D model]* You broke your little ships. *[pause]* See you around, Ahab.

Picard: *[softly, to himself, as he realizes Lily is right]* "And he piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the rage and hate felt by his whole race. If his chest had been a cannon he would have shot his heart upon it."

Sloane: What?

Picard: *Moby Dick.*

Sloane: Actually, I never read it.

Picard: Ahab spent years hunting the white whale that crippled him; but in the end, it destroyed him and his ship.

Sloane: I guess that captain didn't know when to quit.

Questions for Discussion:

- What Transcendentalist values/tenets do you see at work? (e.g. Picard's nonconformity with the Borg's Hive-Mind, and fighting to hold onto his freedom of thought and self-determination.)
- What do we think about the Transcendentalist belief in the sacredness of Nature that would also create entities like the Borg?
- What values/beliefs do you see that directly conflict with Transcendentalist values? (e.g. the Borg embody conformity, and Picard's desire to fight back may be an expression of nonconformity. But what about his desire for revenge? How does that align with the sense of one's inner light/intuition?)
- How do we tell the difference between fighting the Borg to protect the Enterprise, from fighting that is about revenge or power over another?
- Or... How do we tell the difference between civil disobedience and simple rebellion/anarchy?
- How do we know when we "have evolved" and transcended our limitations (as Picard angrily claims), or just deceiving ourselves into thinking that?
- Or... Explorers in Star Trek travel vast distances and meet strange beings, but no matter what they encounter, ultimately the Trekkers continue to explore "what it is to be human." What have humans transcended in ourselves and what still holds us captive? (e.g. Are we post-racial, or does our history include both movement forward and backward?)

9. **Announcement:** Next week is COA Sunday, so we don't have class, but please go to the service and support our 9th graders!

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.”

Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

View clip: (Set context: At an earlier point, the Borg had captured Captain Picard and assimilated him into the Hive Mind. Talk about conformity to the collective mind! Picard was eventually freed. In this clip, the Borg have captured the Enterprise, taken the starship back in time to first contact with the Vulcans in an attempt to alter history. Picard seems set on fighting back, even at the risk of sacrificing his crew.)

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