

JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ENDINGS ART

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Death is an inevitable reality in our lives. We will all die someday. Everyone we love will die someday.
- If we face this knowledge with courage and grace, death can become a teacher. Death's inevitability has the potential to make our lives more meaningful.

Lesson Materials

- Kids should have their sheet of Brush Stroke paper, a paint brush, some water, and a water-proof surface to work on.
- One teacher ready to share this document open to pages 4-5.
- Optional: one teacher with a browser open to share additional Memento Mori paintings linked in Activity One.

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

The reality of death has become a definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by my looking death in the eye and accepting it, by accepting destruction as a part of life and no longer wasting my energies on fear of death or the refusal to acknowledge its inevitability. It sounds paradoxical: by excluding death from our life, we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life we enlarge and enrich it.

-Etty Hillesum

"Trisha's grandma used to say that the stars were holes in the sky. They were the light of heaven coming from the other side. And she used to say that someday she would be on the other side, where the light comes from. One evening they lay on the grass together and counted the lights from heaven. 'You know,' her grandma said, 'all of us will go there someday. Hang on to the grass, or you'll lift right off the ground, and there you'll be!' They laughed, and both hung on to the grass. But it was not long after that night that her grandma must have let go of the grass, because she went to where the lights were, on the other side. And not long after that, Trisha's grandpa let go of the grass, too."

- Patricia Polacco, from *Thank You, Mr. Falker*

And I will show that there is no imperfection in the present, and
can be none in the future,
And I will show that whatever happens to anybody, it may be turn'd
to beautiful results,
And I will show that nothing can happen more beautiful than death,
And I will thread a thread through my poems that time and events
are compact,
And that all the things of the universe are perfect miracles, each
as profound as any.

- Walt Whitman, *Starting from Paumanok*

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

A confident, conversational approach to this topic, death, will reassure kids. If you convey a sense that it's easy for you to talk about death without feeling overwhelmed by feelings of sadness or fear, they'll be far more open and relaxed and ready to contribute to the discussion.

BEFORE CLASS BEGINS

As children come into the group, ask if they have supplies ready for class. Parents were asked to save the sheet of grey Brush Stroke Paper that was mailed to each child. They also need a paint brush, some water, and something water-proof to lay the paper on (a plastic clipboard, cookie sheet, plastic cutting board, etc). If the kids don't have them, ask them to get them now.

CHECK-IN

🕒 5-10 minutes

Allow a teacher to lead the group in a name game, an icebreaker, a get-to-know-you questions, or a simple 'How are things?' moment. Spend more time if the group seems eager to connect with each other. Light the chalice and say:

“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth, and the warmth of love.”

COVENANT

🕒 3 minutes

Review the discussion of how the group wants to be together. Update the notes, if necessary. Save the covenant for future classes.

- Share this document on your screen, if you can.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE THINKING ABOUT MEMENTO MORI ART

🕒 10-15 minutes

In 17th century Europe, lots of artists were painting different versions of the same idea. This happens in art a lot; people get a creative idea and then everyone tries it out themselves for a while. One of these trends was called “Memento Mori” art. We will look at several famous examples and talk about what the paintings have in common. One teacher should share their screen and display the images on pages 5-6 of this lesson plan, one at a time. Use your browser or PDF viewer's zoom function to get a large image that fits the screen.

Discussion Questions:

- What do you see in every picture?
- How do skulls make you feel?
- Do we still draw skulls? Do you see skulls in pictures or on posters? Where?
- Is there anything alive in any of these paintings?
- Does the boy in the painting look sad or scared?

After an opening discussion, talk about these ideas:

It might surprise you that the artists didn't want us to feel grossed out, or scared or even sad when we look at these pictures. They wanted us to learn something from their paintings. The words “Memento Mori” mean “Remember Death”. But how can we who are living remember death if we haven't died yet? Well, the art-

ists hoped we would remember that death is *going* to happen. They hoped that if we remember death, then we'll remember something WAY more important: we're ALIVE and we should live our lives well.

The painters of these images wanted us to remember that while are alive, like the boy in the painting, we can enjoy beautiful things, like the tulip. What do you think of this idea?

If the group is enjoying this discussion and would like to see more images, [go to this link](#) with three more images and some further thoughts on the topic.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO

THE IMPERMANENT IN ART

WATER PAINTINGS

🕒 15-20 minutes

At Unity (some in the Yellow and Green groups will remember from three years ago!) we have a set of special water painting boards called “Buddha Boards”. With water and brushes, you can paint an image on the board that lasts for a while but then disappears as the strokes dry. Since we can't be together in the Art room, children all got a sheet of special Brush Stroke paper that works the same way.

We'll spend time painting different things and we'll watch them disappear as the water dries. Give the kids a series of prompts for their subjects, the final prompt being a still life just like in the “Memento Mori” painting, with a tulip, a skull and an hourglass.

Give the children one of the four prompts below. After the children have painted it, discuss the correlating discussion question(s).

1. Write your name in an artistic way

- After we die, are our names forgotten? How do our names last beyond our death?

2. Paint a person

- When a person dies, do they disappear forever? What part is gone? What part of that person might last beyond their death?

3. Paint an entire family of people: Grandparents, parents, children...

- In a family, there are often great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, children, friends, and pets. In your painting, which figures disappeared the soonest, the ones you painted first or last? Could you keep painting new people? But would the first people you painted still be visible? How is this like a family of many generations? Have any of your grandparents died? Will you tell us a story about that?

4. Paint a still life (*Vanitas* on page 5)

- Does the still life look familiar?
- Were you able to paint all three things before something started to disappear? How did it feel to keep painting as things disappeared?
- Do you wish you were painting with regular paint and paper? Would you take your painting home?

Discussion Questions:

- How would your paintings have been different if you were using paint that lasted?
- How is life like these short-lived paintings?
- How is death like these short-lived paintings?
- How often do you think about death?
- How often do you think about life?
- Do you feel sad or happy right now? A different feeling?

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 3 minutes

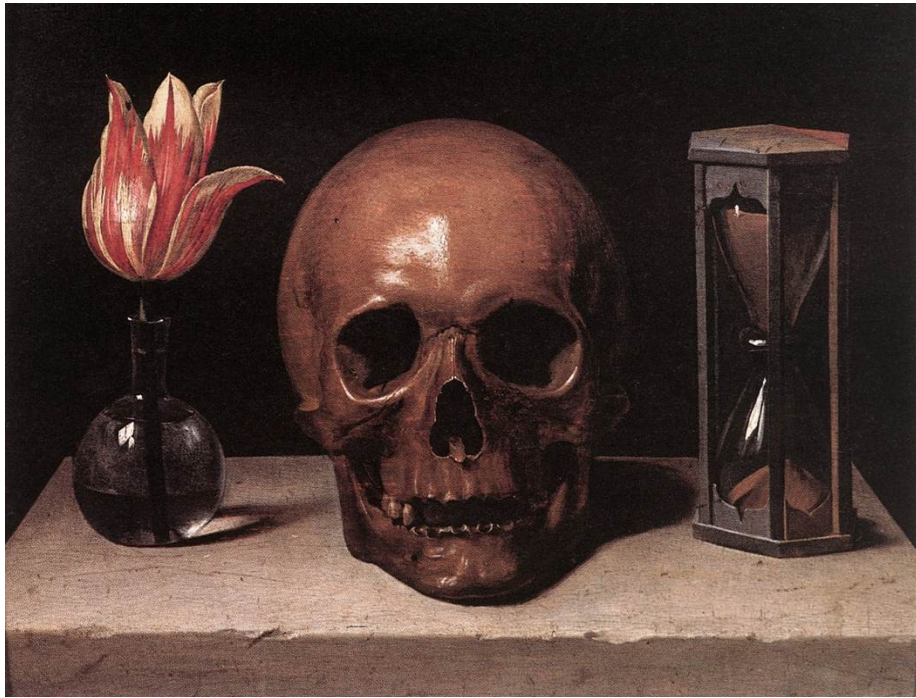
Share this page on one teacher's screen. Join hands in a circle (by having everyone hold their hands up at the edge of the view of their camera) or ask everyone to assume a comfortable, meditative position. Read these words from Mary Oliver to the children. Teach or remind them that "mortal" means "going to die."

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and when it comes time to let it go,
to let it go.

Unlight the chalice, saying: "though we extinguish the light of the chalice here, we know that the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."

**ART FROM THE MEMENTO MORI
TRADITION, PART I**

Vanitas
by Phillippe de Champaigne



Youth with a Skull
by Frans Hals



**ART FROM THE MEMENTO MORI
TRADITION, PART 2**

Vita Brevis Ars Longa
by Rein Nomm

