



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO ENDINGS STORY

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 helpful teacher. Death's inevitability has the potential to make our lives more meaningful.

Lesson Materials

- Spirit Play Lesson video and YouTube video of Annie and the Old One links open on one teacher's browser, ready to share the screen and sound with the class.
- Photos of some gravestone inscriptions at the end of this document, one teacher having them open and ready share on their screen.

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*

BEFORE CHECK-IN

🕒 Before class begins

There is not enough time in class to do all four of the activities. Plan with your teaching team which 2-3 activities you want to do (one should be the epitaph activity).

As kids join the class group, ask them if they have paper and a pencil or marker. If they don't, ask them if they can quickly get these things and rejoin the group.

CHECK-IN

🕒 5-10 minutes

Allow one of the teachers 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.

GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕒 5-8 minutes

During this unit, we're talking about death. While death is a sad thing, right now we're talking how death is a helpful teacher, too. Remembering that everyone dies can help us pay attention to life while we're alive.

- Have the children ever read a story in which a character dies? Tell us about those stories. How does their death happen? How does it change the story? How did you feel when you first read that part?
- If you wrote a story, would any of your characters die? Why or why not?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE

A BUDDHIST PARABLE: KISA AND THE MUSTARD SEED MEDICINE

🕒 10 minutes

This Buddhist parable about the inevitability of death will be familiar to your group, since the children acted out this story two weeks ago in Drama. If teachers think that the class will not benefit from revisiting the story, you can go directly to the Wondering or to just spend more time on the other two activities. If we were in-person, we would have the children relax and listen to the story to see if they see it differently than they did when they played out the roles in Drama class. Today, please ask the children to watch the video of the story as told to the Spirit Play kids recently.

Here are two links. Test them ahead of time and see which works better for the teacher that will share the video and sound.

[Buddha and the Mustard Seed video via OneDrive](#)

[Buddha and the Mustard Seed via Google Docs](#)

Wondering Together

- I wonder: why didn't Buddha just explain that the child had died and there was nothing he could do?
- I wonder: was there a place anywhere on the planet with a house where no one has experienced the sadness of death?
- I wonder: would the story have been different if the child had been all grown up already?
- I wonder: how will the mother's life be different now?
- I wonder: how did you feel during this story?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO

EPITAPHS: LIFE'S SHORT STORIES

🕒 10-15 minutes

When people die and their bodies are buried or their ashes interred, we often mark the spot and celebrate their lives with a special marker called a headstone. Headstones have words inscribed onto them called epitaphs, words that describe and honor the life of the deceased. You can tell what was important by reading their epitaph.

Thinking about our own death can remind us of the gift of being alive, of the wonderful opportunity we have each moment to strive to be our true and best selves. We can imagine the day when our loved ones will write an epitaph about us.

Rather than meant to make us feel gloomy or sad, imagining our epitaph can help us to reflect on how we truly want to live now and how best we want to be remembered.

Here are some examples of epitaph inscriptions:

- “Beloved parent”
- “Beloved partner”
- “A worker for peace and justice”
- “A lover of animals”
- “A loyal friend”
- “Brought music to the world”

You can show the example photos of epitaphs at the end of this document, page 5-8. One teacher should have this document open and ready to share their screen. Change the zoom to focus on one image at a time.

For Red group:

With these younger children, you'll work together to create one UU epitaph. Open the Zoom whiteboard app or your own drawing app (Paint is easy to use and comes with most versions of Windows). Draw a big upside down U and close off the bottom and then click on “Text” to type on the shape. Use their ideas to fill in the gravestone with a marker. You can save the images and start a new one if your group has a lot of ideas. Ask the children, “What do you think most people want their gravestone to say?” You can joke a little, if you

need to lighten the mood in order to elicit responses: “Do you think they’d want it to say: ‘She was grumpy the whole time’ or ‘He was a friend to everyone?’” You can volunteer things you wouldn’t mind seeing on your own gravestone.

Let’s write an epitaph for a Unitarian Universalist who has lived their life well. Some epitaphs rhyme – should we make ours rhyme like a poem?

For Yellow and Green groups:

Older kids, whose writing skills may be more developed, can work individually on their own epitaph. Ask kids to get out the paper and pencil or marker they have ready.

Ask the class, “If a Unitarian Universalist lived their life really well, what things would people write on their gravestone after they died? What would their epitaph say?”

PRIMARY ACTIVITY THREE

ANNIE AND THE OLD ONE

🕒 20 minutes

Here's another story about the inevitability of death. Annie tries to postpone her grandmother’s inevitable death by sabotaging her weaving project. Please tell the kids they can choose to sit up and watch if they're interested in seeing the artwork or to lean back and relax if they'd rather just hear it. Have the video cued up 12 seconds in to skip the intro and stop at 15:20. [Annie and the Old One](#)

Wondering Together

- I wonder: how does Annie change during this story?
- I wonder: how might Grandmother feel about dying?
- What do you think we can we learn from this story?
- Is the ending of this story happy or sad? Can a story be happy and sad at the same time?

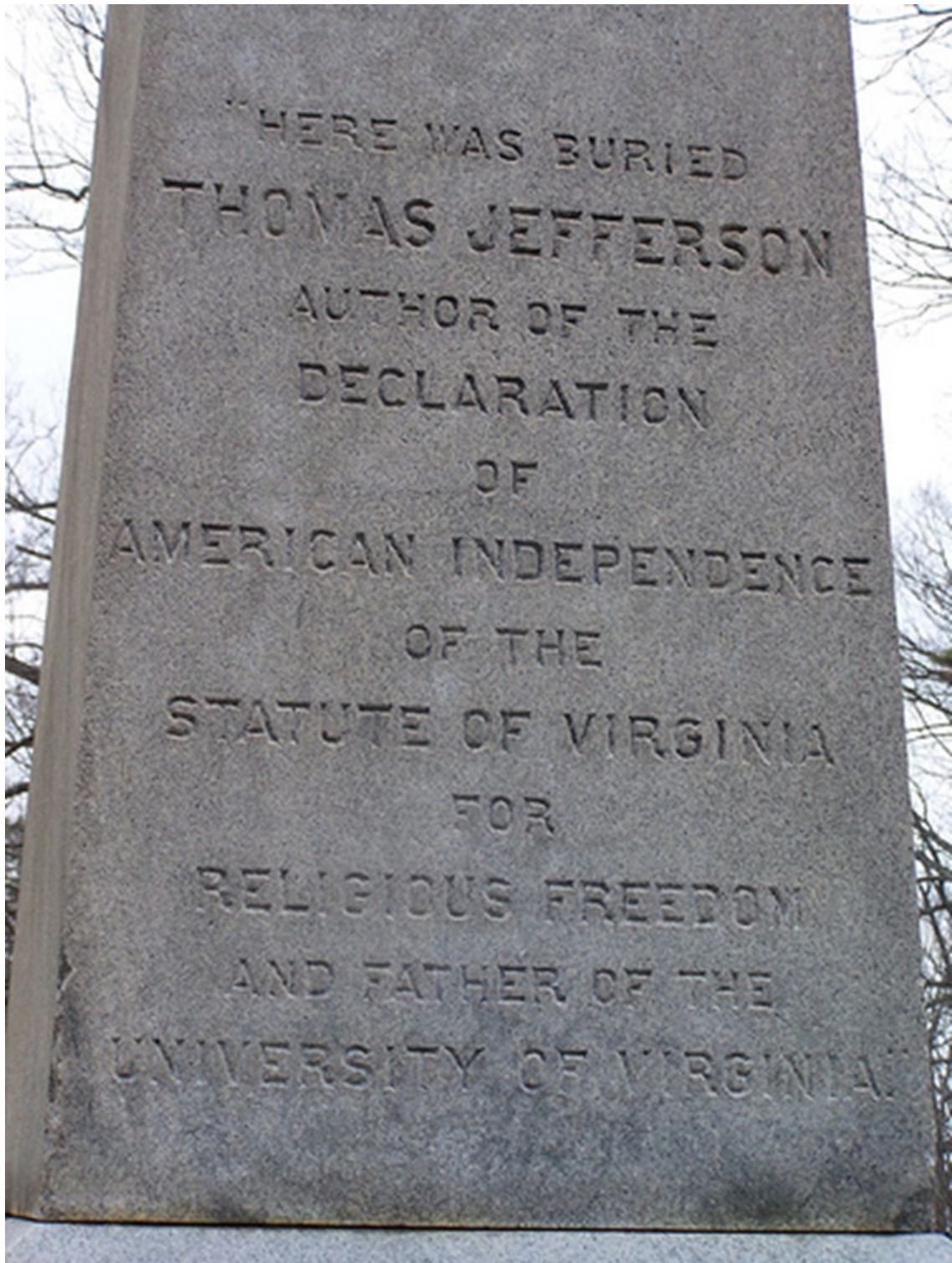
CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

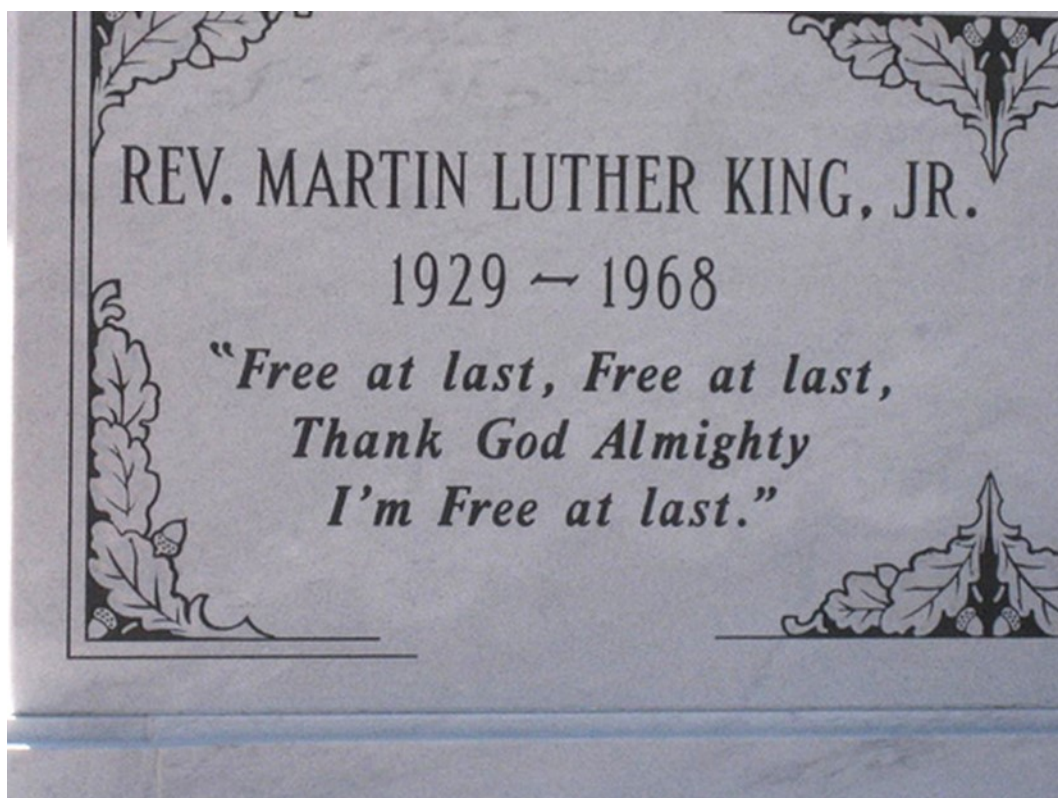
🕒 3 minutes

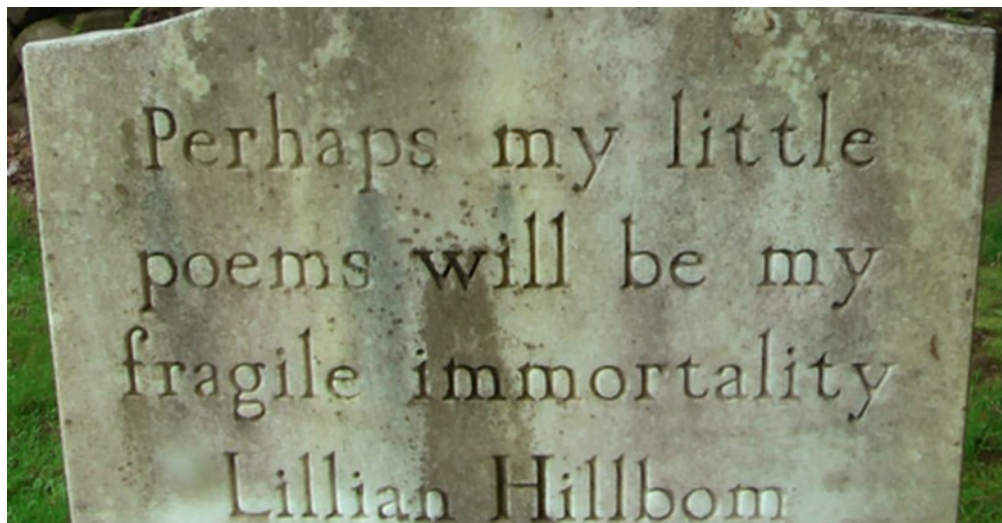
Share this page on one teacher’s screen. Join hands in a circle (by having everyone hold their hands up at the edge of the view of their camera) or ask everyone to assume a comfortable, meditative position. Read these words from Mary Oliver to the children. Teach or remind them that “mortal” means “going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









by dev|elephant

