



## **Teachers Guide: Afterlife Grades 6-12 Lesson**

### **“Exploring Different Cultural Attitudes Toward Death”**

#### **Teaching End-of-Life Issues in the Classroom**

For many people death can be a difficult topic to discuss. The challenge for educators is to provide children with a variety of strategies that allow them to discuss openly the issues surrounding death and dying. To do so effectively requires sensitivity, courage, and the creation of a classroom climate where children feel comfortable discussing their feelings. These lessons were created to provide teachers with multiple entry points for dealing with children's experiences of death, dying and the afterlife. The following lessons will be useful in helping children deal with the death or illness of a family member, friend, or pet, as well as media-reported deaths, including those of celebrities and victims of mass tragedies. In this guide you'll also find some tips and strategies for using *With Eyes Open*--the program and its Web site--in your classroom. Teachers may tape *With Eyes Open* and use the videotape for educational purposes for up to ten days after the broadcast.

To purchase the tape, call Films for the Humanities & Sciences at 1-800-257-5126 or visit: [www.films.com](http://www.films.com).

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this lesson is to develop students' understanding of their personal concepts of the afterlife, as well as those of different cultures. This will be done through researching different cultures' funeral customs, reading a poem, and exploring afterlife myths from a variety of cultures.

Duration: 5 hours (This may vary depending on how much of the work is done outside of class.)

#### **Materials:**

- Internet Access. (You may want to use the computer lab for this assignment. Another option is to have students who have Internet access at home do their work at home. If you have a projection facility, you can do the research as a class.)
- Paper and Writing Utensils
- Chart Paper

#### **Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Research their own as well as other various cultures' funeral customs.

2. Read afterlife myths from different cultures.
3. Create a class presentation based on the information they learned from the afterlife myths.

### **Developing Background**

1. Read the following quote to the class:  
"There is no death, only a change of worlds."  
-Chief Seattle, Leader of six Indian tribes in the Pacific Northwest,  
in an 1854 speech to Gov. Isaac Stevens, found in *The American Reader*,  
ed. by D. Ravitch (NF)
2. Brainstorm possible meanings.
3. Ask the class if they agree or disagree with Chief Seattle.
4. Different people have different views on the afterlife. Ask students to reflect in writing for a brief period on their own views of the afterlife.
5. Divide the class into pairs or small groups and ask the students to share their thoughts.
6. Discuss the following questions:
  - Why do people have different views on the afterlife?
  - What roles do religion, culture and spirituality play in people's understandings of the afterlife?
7. Ask students to discuss the afterlife with their parents and family members.

### **Activity One**

Duration: 2 hours (This time may vary depending on how much of the work is completed outside of the classroom.)

In this activity students will research a variety of different funeral customs.

1. Divide the class into small research groups of 4 or 5 students.
2. Assign each group to one of the following websites:

Ghana Funeral

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/africanlives/ghana/ghana.htm>

Khants Funeral Customs

<http://haldjas.folklore.ee/folklore/vol7/khants.htm>

Tibetan Sky Burial

[http://www.tibet.ca/wtnar\\_chive/1999/7/14\\_1.html](http://www.tibet.ca/wtnar_chive/1999/7/14_1.html)

Jewish Mourning

<http://www.jewishfunerals.com/mourning.html>

Romani Customs

<http://www.geocities.com/Paris/5121/death.htm>

3. Ask students to find and record ten pieces of information from the site that they choose to research.
4. Have the students prepare a brief presentation to share what they have learned with the class.

5. Create a class chart to compare and contrast the various beliefs of the cultures that were researched.
6. Discuss how each of these customs informs our understandings of the beliefs, values, and attitudes of different cultures toward death.
7. Generate a list of funeral customs that exist in our society.
8. What does this list tell us about some of our beliefs, values, and attitudes toward death?

## Activity Two

Duration: 2 hours 30 minutes (This time may vary depending on how much of the work is completed outside of the classroom.)

The purpose of this activity is to encourage students to think about the various ways different cultures view the afterlife.

1. Share the following poem from the Indigenous People's Literature site:  
<http://www.indigenouspeople.org/natlit/natlit.htm>

### *Spirit of Yesterday*

I've walked the lands of the ancient ones  
Long since gone Generations  
I can still feel their laughter .....their pain  
I can still hear their songs.....  
Hear their drums beating against a darken sky.....  
I can see them dancing...  
I can still see horses painted up for war  
Still see Mothers and Wives with Tears in their eyes  
But Pride in their hearts...  
I can hear their Chants.....their prayers  
Still the memories and pride run deep in my own heart and soul as it did  
the People....Medicine and holy men.....and the Chiefs....  
This is My heritage.....the American Indians  
Spirit of Yesterday.....Is the Spirit of Tomorrow .....

2. Divide the class into small research groups of 4 or 5 students.
3. Have each group select and read one of the afterlife myths found on the following site:  
<http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/cressida.htm>
4. Ask the students to answer the following questions:
  - What does this myth indicate about the culture of its people?
  - What does your group appear to value?
  - How do they describe the afterlife?
  - What role does nature play in your myth?
  - What role do you think myths play your culture, and how might it be different from the culture you read about?

5. Each group should present its myth to the class in some artistic format. This might be a brief skit, a poster, a poem, a reflective essay, or a musical response. Encourage students to focus on the ways the myth illustrates some aspect of a cultural belief or philosophy about death and dying.

### **The Authors**

KQED Education Network (KQED EdNet) inspires learning through innovative understanding, use and creation of media that respects diverse perspectives. KQED EdNet is committed to the exchange of ideas and resources in partnership with the community. To this end, it provides an instructional television service, curriculum materials, projects for youth and professional development for teachers, child care providers and families; organizes public forums; and sponsors local events.

Development of the teacher and parent guides was done in partnership with Maureen Carroll and Laurel Blaine, co-founders of Bay Breeze Educational Resources, LLC. Bay Breeze provides engaging K-12 technology-based curriculum that fosters the development of critical thinking skills through the use of the Internet, popular culture, and media.

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