



Teachers Guide: Afterlife Elementary K-5 Lesson

“Understanding the Cyclical Nature of Life”

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.

Introduction

The purpose of this lesson is to develop understandings of different conceptions of the afterlife. This will be done through stories and poetry, examining the ways things in the natural world die or change form, and exploring afterlife myths and burial customs from a variety of different cultures.

Materials:

- *The Next Place* by Warren Hanson
- *What's Heaven?* by Maria Shriver
- *The Fall of Freddy the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia
- *Lion King* CD
- A large roll of butcher block paper
- Green, orange, and brown paper
- Drawing materials and art supplies
- Scissors
- Chart paper

- 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.)

Objectives:

Students will:

1. Begin to understand the cyclical nature of life.
2. Create a visual representation of a cycle.
3. Read and respond to a Sioux Prayer of Passing.
4. Read and respond to a book by creating artistic renderings of life, death and the afterlife.
5. Read and enact an afterlife myth.
6. Read about a variety of other cultures' burial practices.
7. Draw a representation of the afterlife.

Developing Background

The purpose of these background activities is to provide students with an understanding of the cyclical nature of life. Students will listen to a song, read some selections about different ideas about the afterlife, and begin a discussion at home about death and the afterlife.

Background One

1. Listen to Elton John's song from the *Lion King* called "The Circle of Life".
2. Brainstorm and discuss different ideas about the song. What does he mean by "the circle of life?"
3. Talk about why he uses the word "circle."

Background Two

Read one of the following books to your class. If possible use these suggestions; however, other choices may substituted.

- *The Next Place* by Warren Hanson
- *What's Heaven?* by Maria Shriver

Background Three

Have the students ask their parents about what they believe happens after one dies.

Activity One

Duration: 90 minutes

The purpose of this activity is to have students begin to think about the emotions surrounding life, dying and death.

1. Read the book *The Fall of Freddy the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia to the class. This book describes the seasons and the life cycle of a leaf.
2. You will need the following materials:
 - A large roll of butcher block paper
 - Green, orange, and brown paper
 - Drawing materials
 - Scissors

3. Draw a large tree and place it on a classroom wall. Each child should make three leaves. Use green paper to make the leaf that is young and thriving; use orange paper to draw the leaf that is dying; and use brown paper to draw the leaf that is dead.

4. The students should write sentences on each of the leaves. On the green leaf, they should write about how they think the leaf feels to be alive. On the orange leaf, they should write about how the leaf feels about the thought of dying, and on the brown leaf they should write about how they think the leaf feels about being dead.
5. Write a part for a narrator who will act as facilitator by directing the action. The narrator will also explain how this natural process is a benefit to the tree as a whole.
6. Have each child in turn read the sentences on their green leaf, and tape the leaf on the tree.
7. Have each student in turn read the sentences on their orange leaf and place it where it is in the process of falling from the tree.
8. Have each student in turn read the sentences on their brown leaf and stick it underneath the tree.
9. Have the students choose different kinds of music to play while they are hanging the new leaves, the dying leaves, and the dead leaves.
10. You may wish to perform your story for another class, or videotape it.

Activity Two

Duration: 2 hours

1. Read the following Sioux Prayer of Passing to the class:

Never the Spirit is Born

The spirit will never cease to be never

Never the time when it was not.

End and beginning are dreams Birth and deathless and changeless

Remains the spirit forever.

Death has not touched it at all

Dead though the house of it seems.

-Anonymous

2. Discuss the poem's meaning. Introduce the concept that the afterlife means many different things to different peoples in the world.
3. Students will choose one of the myths on the following website:
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1044/tribethompson.htm>
4. Select one of the myths and have the class act it out. You may also use a myth of your own choosing.
5. Have the students create a representation of the myth they chose to read. They can draw a picture, build from clay, use manipulatives, or create a diorama.
6. Share student work.

Activity Three

Duration: 90 minutes

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

1. Divide the class into five groups. Assign each group one of the following places: Africa, Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Rome.
2. Each group will go to the following website to research their group's death and burial practices: <http://www.emory.edu/CARLOS/ODYSSEY>
3. When students get to the site they should click on their assigned area of study. When they get to this page they should scroll down and click on Death & Burial.

4. Groups will research the following areas:
 - How they were buried
 - What was buried with them
 - Multiple or single burials
 - Beliefs
 - Any other interesting facts
5. After students have completed their research use the information to complete a class chart.
6. Write the words Africa, Near East, Egypt, Greece, Rome and United States across the top of the chart.
7. Write the five categories listed above on the left-hand side of the chart.
8. Each group will fill in their section of the chart.
9. As a class fill in the section for the (current day) United States.
10. Compare and contrast the different areas.
11. Ask the students to create a drawing of their interpretation of the afterlife.

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.

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