

## **FAITH FEST OWENSBORO POEMS & PRAYERS LESSON**

### **Objectives:**

- To engage students in exploring poems and prayers within their faith tradition
- To have students write a personal faith poem or prayer for their use at home
- To include the poems and prayers of students in the display of Sacred Texts at the Daviess County Public Library. The display will take place on Saturday, 15 Nov, 12:30-2 pm.

### **Things to know:**

- This lesson is designed for use by religious education programs with students who are not able to participate in the event at Daviess County Public Library on Monday, 10 November @ 6pm.
- Poems and prayers produced by students in your program can be displayed in the public display at the Library if they are turned in at the library by Thursday, 13 November @12 n.
- Two formats are provided:
  - A short version to be done in 15 minutes
  - A long form to be done in 45-60 minutes
- The long form of this lesson uses a modified form of a didactic model called Shared Praxis: It begins with what a student knows, tells part of the "Big Story" of the faith tradition in which she/he is being educated, connects him/her to this "Big Story," and asks for a response (in this case, the composition of a poem or prayer) to put what has been learned to use.
- The Activity Pages that will be used in the Library event are available for your use. They can be found at [www.uuowensboro.org](http://www.uuowensboro.org) under the Faith Fest heading. They may also be used in a short format to supplement another lesson that you have planned.

### **SHORT LESSON: POEMS & PRAYERS ACTIVITY (15 min)**

#### **BEFORE CLASS: CHOOSE a famous poem and prayer from your tradition.**

- Choose a text from your holy Scripture or from the writings or practice of a saint or hero of your tradition.
- If you are incorporating this in another lesson, choose a poem or prayer that emphasizes the material and theme that you're teaching and address the text in your lesson plan.

#### **(2-3 min) READ the pieces aloud in your group. TELL students that sacred poems and prayers are the expressions of our hearts to God.**

- Ask students to identify:
  - What does the text say about God? About our relationship with God?
  - What emotion is conveyed by the text?
  - What words and images do they think are strongest in the text?

#### **(2-3 min) GUIDE students in making notes on their experience with emotions in their own relationship with God.**

- What do you know about God and God's care for you?
- What are you feeling that you need to offer to God today?
- What words or images strongly convey how you are feeling?

#### **(9-11 min) Allow students to WRITE AND DECORATE a short poem or prayer and sign with their first name only. If you have time, read them to each other.**

- Be sure to write your organization's name and the student's grade on the back of each poem or prayer you submit for the display.

## FULL LESSON: POEMS & PRAYERS (45-60 min)

### (10 minutes) FOCUSING ACTIVITY

Use any or all of the following questions to engage students in naming what they already know about the lesson's primary topic.

#### Primary Students

- What is your favorite story about God or God's people? What does it teach you about God?
- What is most important about the story for you? How does it make you feel?
- Who told you that story the first time? Have you seen that story in a play, movie, or TV show?
- What were the first nursery rhymes or poems about God that you learned? What did they teach you? (If your group includes preschoolers, you may want to sing or recite these together.)

#### Middle School Students

- What is the Holy Scripture of our tradition?
- Was our Holy Scripture received, revealed, or authored? When did that happen? Who was important in the process?
- When did you realize that our Holy Scripture was different from other traditions? What difference does that make for us?
- Poems and prayers are expressions of our hearts. They allow us to be honest with God about our lives. What do you know about the poems and prayers in our Scripture? (Please remember it is okay if they can't identify any at this point; you will teach this in a few minutes.)

#### High School Students

- What is the Holy Scripture of our tradition?
- Was our Holy Scripture received, revealed, or authored? When did that happen? Who was important in the process? How does that history impact your life?
- When did you realize that our Holy Scripture was different from other traditions? What do you know about the differences? How does that influence your ability to talk with other people?
- What part of the Holy Scripture touches your heart most deeply?
- What part reflects your heart's desires or hopes, pains or worries today?

### (20-25 minutes) INPUT & CONNECTIONS

**ADAPT the input to the developmental level of your students.**

**USE THE CONNECTIONS that help emphasize the lesson to your particular students.**

Long before movies, videos, TV, and games on tablets... Long before plays, books and encyclopedias... God reached out to humanity and directed us to what we need to live in a good relationship with God. Our master Teacher, \_\_\_\_\_, had an amazing encounter with God.

*CONNECT: Describe that briefly here. If your tradition has multiple Scriptures, focus on the one you are studying with your students right now and the persons associated with it.*

Our Holy Scripture recounts his experiences and the teachings given to us through him. Often the Scripture uses stories to illustrate the righteous life revealed to us. All human beings love stories. Stories engage us and orient us. Holy Scripture is a special kind of book because it includes sacred stories from God. God desires to reach us in very practical ways so we can draw closer to God. These stories guide us in moral behavior and duties for day-to-day living; they instruct us in how to treat the stranger; they teach us how to think through difficult situations; and they outline our obligations to God and to each other.

*CONNECT: Discuss what else the stories of our Scripture teach us and how God reaches out to us.*

Sacred stories are passed on in religious communities—we hear them at the dinner table, in family and community gatherings, and when we attend services. Eventually, we have the opportunity to read and study them for ourselves. When we read Scripture, we notice that language is used in different ways. Often, it is even different from the language we speak every day.

*CONNECT: Discuss the languages in which Scripture was given, written, and its present forms. What is hard about the use of different languages? How do you explain your Scriptural languages to friends from other traditions? What benefit is there in knowing or knowing about different languages?*

Once we learn it, we realize that Holy Scripture uses strong and beautiful language—as well as simple and clear language. When we need guidance, our hearts are often moved by what we find there. Sometimes the language seems hard or harsh and we need the help of teachers and mentors to understand its meaning. Sometimes we need friends to help us open our hearts to these hard passages. Frequently, texts are set to music to engage us even more deeply. In fact, in some traditions, the Scripture is always sung. In traditions that don't do this, psalms, benedictions, and hymns are special Scriptural forms that are easy to set to music because of their prayerful and poetic nature.

*CONNECT: Play or sing a Scriptural song to demonstrate the difference from reading. If your students especially love music, find two different settings of the same piece and ask them to describe how their experience of the text is changed by hearing it performed in different ways.*

Prayers and poems are special devotional forms in religious traditions. Psalms, poems, hymns, and prayers are often categorized based on their themes: Thanksgiving, praise, petition, sorrow or confession, lament. We use them to focus our minds and express our hearts to God. Sometimes they help us ask questions and seek guidance in tough situations. Always they are about building our relationship with God.

- Memorized forms or prayers are especially helpful when we are in a situation that makes it hard to think or when we want everyone to be able to pray out loud with us.

*CONNECT: Name some forms that teach the pattern of prayers or specific prayers that your tradition uses. E.g. The Lord's Prayer, Salat, specific Berakah.*

- Heart prayers are especially helpful when we need to put words on this action or moment, the condition of our spirits, and our emotions.

*CONNECT: Who do you know that is especially good at this kind of prayer? How does he or she help your community with personal prayer?*

- Poetry is especially helpful in putting words on our experience when we encounter mystery, wonder, overwhelming gratitude, tragedy, and uncertainty. It often allows us to capture a moment and communicate it to others even if we can describe it adequately.

*CONNECT: Read a psalm from Scripture or a devotional poem from someone in your tradition. This may be someone famous in history or it may be something contemporary published popularly, like a verse on a greeting card.*

### **(15-20 minutes) RESPONSE**

**PLAY WITH WORDS** by writing a poem or prayer expressing your heart today.

**Please note: This is not an academic exercise, but an invitation to be creative with spiritual language.** If your students speak several languages, please let them use whatever is most comfortable for them. (If possible, please provide a translation for the display.) Use the simple definition: Poetry is that which does not fill the line. In other words, in this case, honesty is more important than rhyme, meter, or formal poetic forms. **Even students who are not strong with written language can do this.**

Choose which options work for your students. If you plan to submit them to the Library display, please keep them on paper 8.5 x 11" or smaller.

- Use the segments GUIDE and WRITE AND DECORATE under the Short Form Lesson on page 1.
- Several kinds of worksheets with starter exercises are available at [www.uuowensboro.org](http://www.uuowensboro.org) under the Faith Fest heading. These are targeted at Primary and Middle School students. However, older students and teachers/adults can do the activities on a more sophisticated level. They include:
  - Haiku: One about the attributes of God, one about a personal question about life
  - Cinquain: About Holy Scripture and its influence in my life
  - Word association/Tone poem: About the themes of Scripture and what I associate them with in my daily life
  - Prayers/ postcard size: About praying for everyday needs and events
- Ask students to identify an attribute of God or a challenge in everyday life that they take to God. Then have them write their feelings about, responses to, and questions around that in a poem. Or have students write a prayer about something you have been studying in class.

## FOR FUN

Match the religious tradition to their Holy Scriptures.  
Some traditions have more than one answer and not all Scriptures  
are included for these traditions.

Do you practice a tradition with Scriptures that aren't on the list?



BUDDHISM

CHRISTIANITY

CONFUCIANISM

HINDUISM

ISLAM

JAINISM

JUDAISM

SIKHISM

TAOISM

BIBLE

TANAK

GITA

KALPA SUTRA

VEDAS

QUR'AN

TAO TE CHING

DHAMMAPADA

ANALECTS

GURU GRANTH SAHIB