

Session # 3 Henry Builds a Cabin

Overview: Walden's chapter on "Economy," by Henry David Thoreau, generates the tale of Henry, a bear outfitted in a farm hat and an outdoorsman's warm clothes. Henry diagrams his dream house, a one-room cabin. "He borrow[s] an ax and cut[s] down twelve trees," hews the pine logs into thick posts for the cabin's frame, and constructs his walls from the weathered boards and windows of "an old shed." When friends like Emerson and Alcott pronounce the cabin "too small," Henry replies, "It's bigger than it looks." He proudly guides them to a vegetable garden ("This will be my dining room") and a winding path to the pond ("This will be the ballroom"). The conclusion finds Henry happily outdoors in his "library"; he gets under his roof only when it rains.

Goal: Encourage children to think for themselves and to simplify their lives.

Principle: The web of life's the way.

Source: U.U. history

Belief: We can change our choices.

UU Identity: Simplify and think for themselves

Holiday/Theme: Thoreau

Supplies:

Book

Copies of Take Home Page

Supplies for the activities you chose

Décor for the room

Stuffed bear, optional to use for the sharing circle

Set Up: For Activity #3, collect recyclables such as toilet paper tubes, cereal boxes and egg cartons in advance.

Entering Activity: Have Lincoln Logs or Legos out for the children to build with. Suggest that they build houses.

Sharing Circle:

After the children have arrived, invite them to gather in a circle around the chalice for the story.

Chalice Lighting:

Bring out the chalice and candle, matches, match holder (an ashtray or clay saucer will work,) and snuffer. Set out the chalice and the water bowl with rocks to drop in for sharing "Joys and Concerns."

Invite the children to recite with you the following chalice lighting words:

"To this quiet place of beauty we come from busy things, pausing for a moment for the thoughts that quiet brings."

Light the match and hold it to the candle wick.

“We light this chalice for the warmth of love, the light of truth and the energy of action.”
Place the spent match in the match holder.

Invite the children to share important things that have happened in their lives, passing a talking stick, shell or rock to indicate whose turn it is to share. In this session, it is especially effective to use a stuffed bear to pass around. Have each child share a joy or a concern by dropping a small polished rock into the water bowl.

Say something like: “We will now share our joys and concerns in our sharing circle. Each of us will have a turn to speak while the rest listen. You don’t have to share, you can always say, “pass.”

After everyone has shared who wishes to, add one more rock and say, “For all the joys and concerns which remain unspoken, we add this rock.”

You may prefer to extinguish the chalice flame with the snuffer at this point.

“Though we extinguish this flame, we kindle the flame to carry in our hearts together.”

Read “**Henry Builds a Cabin.**”

UU Identity teachable moment: Ask the children for their reflections on the story. Say something like, “Our seventh principle states that “The web of life’s the way.” Show them the poster of the Do-Re-Mi Principles with the Principles in children’s language. Sing it if you wish. Say something like “In this book, Henry designs and builds a simple house, without needing huge spaces of his own, but rather using the beauty of the woods around him. We Unitarian Universalists seek to be a part of the web of life. We celebrate living simply and choosing our own way of life. How might we live simply today? Could we play some games that don’t take a lot of supplies? What ones do you know? (Tag, Jump rope, hopscotch, fairy houses...see below) Let’s see how much fun we can have on how little new ‘stuff.’” Describe the activities that you have prepared and invite the children to engage in them.

Activities: Choose from the following options.

1) Games

Invite the children to play some of the games they thought of such as tag or singing and chanting games like “Duck, Duck, Goose” or “Rock, Scissors, Paper.”

2) Fairy Houses

Describe how to build “Fairy Houses” – you are invited to make a house for a fairy or a troll. They like houses outdoors, in cozy, small places. You must only use materials that you find laying around, like pine needles, rocks, leaves, twigs. Make a house with a friend! Take a look at the book “Fairy Houses” by Tracy L. Kane for a story about them.

3) Junk Sculpture

Collect a variety of safe recyclables, such a toilet paper tubes, cereal boxes, plastic yogurt containers, egg cartons, etc. Add duct tape, and invite the children to create junk sculptures.

4) Take pictures. Don’t forget to take pictures of these activities for your own picture book.

Closing: When the urge hits to get the next biggest and best thing advertised on TV, remember Henry and his message of living simply.

Background for Teachers: Both “Fairy Houses” and “Junk Sculpture” activities were popular hits at the Gaia Week Day Camp we offered in the summer of 2008.

In my undergraduate days, a professor returned from an orphanage in China and reported that there were 60 children and no toys. She had taken a toy as a gift. The directors had the children sit in a large circle of all 60 children and pass around this one toy. The children were incredibly patient. But far from being deprived, they then jumped up and put on all kinds of singing, chanting, skits, exercises, and dances. Our U.S. emphasis on toys and materials could certainly be modified! The Chinese children used the resources that were available to them.

Just for fun, download the cut out Thoreau Cabin at <http://www.fg-warehouse.net/freebees/THOREAU-CABIN/cabin.pdf> While it would be too hard for primary children, it’s worth knowing about if you have older children around.

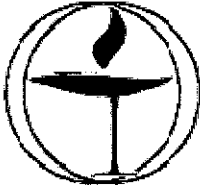
Unitarian Henry David Thoreau (born David Henry Thoreau; July 12, 1817 – May 6, 1862) was an American author, poet, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, historian, philosopher, and leading transcendentalist. He is best known for his book *Walden*, a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings, and his essay, *Civil Disobedience*, an argument for individual resistance to civil government in moral opposition to an unjust state.

Thoreau's books, articles, essays, journals, and poetry total over 20 volumes. Among his lasting contributions were his writings on natural history and philosophy, where he anticipated the methods and findings of ecology and environmental history, two sources of modern day environmentalism.

He was a lifelong abolitionist, delivering lectures that attacked the Fugitive Slave Law while praising the writings of Wendell Phillips and defending abolitionist John Brown. Thoreau’s philosophy of civil disobedience influenced the political thoughts and actions of such later figures as Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Thoreau is sometimes cited as an individualist anarchist as well as an inspiration to anarchists. Though *Civil Disobedience* calls for improving rather than abolishing government – “I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government” – the direction of this improvement aims at anarchism: “‘That government is best which governs not at all;’ and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have.” from Wikipedia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_David_Thoreau

Picture Book UU uses three other of Johnson’s “Henry Books:” *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg*, *Henry Climbs a Mountain*, and *Henry Works*.



Picture Book U.U. Identity: Henry Builds a Cabin

Take Home Page

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