

Session Ten

I am the Pumpkin King!

The objectives of this session are:

- to talk about the importance of being yourself
- to discuss the idea that each person is unique and valuable
- to examine the importance of walking your own path
- to explore the consequences of trying to be something you aren't and how things can go awry when you try to be something other than your authentic self
- to examine what makes each of us the person that we are

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- a chalice and matches or lighter
- stickers or crayons for drawing
- writing paper
- a copy of Resource #12 for each participant
- pens or pencils
- Flip Chart and markers
- One copy of *Singing the Living Tradition*

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole video, use the DVD disc menu to select the opening scene (Scene 3 – “Jack’s Lament”), or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right segment and pause the tape at that point.
- Watch the movie in its entirety prior to the session (even if you have seen it before)
- Create a list of personality traits just in case the group has trouble coming up with some – Encourage the group to keep things positive
- Make copies of Resource #12

Session Outline

Opening Activity: Chalice lighting, reading and centering question (or check-in) (5 min)

Premiere: Introduction and watching an excerpt of the movie, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (42 min)

Reflection: “What’s This?” Discussion and reflection questions (10 min)

Processing: “Who Are You?” (10 min)

Closing: “There you go!” - Closing reading and check-out (5 min)



Opening Activity (5min.)

Ask for a volunteer to light the chalice and share with the group (or have someone read) the opening thought (#434) from *Singing the Living Tradition*:

“May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,
And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.
May we know that we are not isolated beings
But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.”

Anonymous

Go around the circle of participants and ask them to check-in with their name and the answer to the question, “What is your favorite thing about Christmas?”
(Remind the group that anyone always has the right to pass during times of sharing.)

Premiere

Watching *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (42 min.)

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

Jack Skellington is the pumpkin king and he is the master of staging Halloween celebrations. However, it is the same routine every year in Halloween Town, and this particular Halloween, Jack dissatisfied and bored. So he sneaks away from the post Halloween celebration and saunters off into the woods with his dog Zero on Halloween night. Upon the break of dawn, he discovers a clearing of trees with different doors carved on them, each representing a particular holiday. The Christmas tree door attracts his attention and upon entrance into the world of Christmas, Jack is thrilled and fascinated with this new idea of Christmas. He decides that he must absolutely share the feeling of Christmas Town with the citizens of Halloween Town. Jack decides to take over Christmas - He arranges to kidnap Santa Claus, then takes it upon himself to deliver some alternative gifts to unsuspecting children. Begin the video and watch scenes # 3 ("Jack's Lament") which opens with Jack wandering away from the Halloween celebration and expressing his desire to experience something new and different.

Unbeknownst to Jack, Sally overhears his song as she crouches behind a gravestone to hide from her creator, the Doctor. She understands how Jack feels, but is too shy to go and console him or tell Jack about her feelings for him. She returns to the Doctor to retrieve her arm and tells him that she is restless. He tells her it is just a phase and they must be patient.

Later that morning, Jack has wandered into an unfamiliar part of the woods and happens upon a circle of trees, each with a different, holiday-themed door carved on them. Jack is fascinated with the Christmas tree door and is

swept inside. The door slams behind him and Zero barks in alarm to his now missing owner.

Jack falls through a sort of tunnel and lands with a thud upon a snow covered hill. He walks through the town and is amazed by what he sees; it is so different from Halloween Town! He discovers that he has landed in a place called Christmas Town, and he is determined to find out everything he can about it.

Meanwhile the mayor of Halloween Town has stopped by Jack's house to discuss the plans for next Halloween. He is upset when he gets no answer after ringing Jack's doorbell and is even more distressed when he learns that Jack has been gone all night. He sounds the alarm that Jack is missing and has the whole town look for Jack. Just when he's about to give up, Jack returns from Christmas Town and tells the mayor to call a town meeting.

At the town meeting, Jack tries to explain the feeling of joy and goodwill that pervades Christmas Town, but the people of Halloween Town just don't understand. So he changes his tact and describes Santa Claus (Sandy Claws) as a monster. This excites everyone and they decide to join Jack in his dream to take over Christmas.

Jack gives everyone a task to complete based on their talents. When he asks Sally to make his Santa suit, she tells him that she had a vision about his idea and the whole thing is going to be a disaster. But Jack is too obsessed with his plan that he doesn't really pay attention to what Sally is saying and dismisses her warning.

Meanwhile, the little henchmen of the Boogie Man, (Lock, Shock and Barrel) kidnap Santa Claus and bring him to Jack. Jack explains to Santa that he is getting a break and that Jack is going to take his place this Christmas. Santa protests, and Jack orders the three henchmen to take Santa away and make him comfortable. They decide to take him to Oogie Boogie.

Stop the DVD just after Santa asks his kidnappers, "Haven't you ever heard of peace on Earth and Goodwill to man?"

After dropping Santa off at Oogie Boogie's house, plans continue for the new Christmas. After a few difficulties, Jack eventually takes off in his sleigh and flies off to deliver gifts. People are frightened by the creepy gifts and the police call in the military to shoot down Jack. After realizing that he was wrong to try to take over Christmas, Jack decides that he must get back to Halloween Town and release the real Santa Claus so that he can salvage the holiday. Jack arrives just in time to save both Santa and Sally from the Boogie Man. Santa flies off to deliver Christmas gifts. The movie ends with Santa flying back over Halloween Town and giving Jack a gift – he makes it snow. Sally wanders away and Jack finds her and the two finally get together.

Reflection (10 min.)

What's This?

Begin the discussion by asking for general impressions, and things which occurred to the group as they were watching the video. Then, if no one brings it up, ask the group to consider:

Jack is really great at being the pumpkin king, yet he longs for something different. Have you ever been really good at something, like a video game for instance, and really loved it for a while but eventually got bored with it? Why do you think this happens? (One possible answer to mention is that once the challenge is gone from something we just don't enjoy it as much.) Even though everyone compliments Jack on the Halloween celebration, it doesn't make him feel better. Why? (He's just tired of doing the same thing year after year.) Jack laments that "there's something out there far from my home – a longing that I've never known." How is this similar to what Sally is feeling? (Both Jack and Sally are restless and inquisitive and long to experience new things.) When Jack visits Christmas Town, he says that "in my bones I feel the warmth that's coming from inside." What do you think that "warmth" is? What happens when Jack tries to explain Christmas

Town to the residents of Halloween Town? (You might mention that Sally is the only one who is impressed rather than disgusted by the Christmas tree.) The reaction of the inhabitants of Halloween Town to Christmas is very different from Jack and Sally's. What do you think this is? (One answer might be that the people who live in Halloween Town are happy being really good at scaring people and doing Halloween. They don't want anything else.) What happens when Jack changes his way of presenting the concept of Christmas? How is their understanding of Christmas spirit influenced by their personalities or experiences? (Halloween isn't just their job, it's who they are.) What do you think is the biggest mistake that Jack makes? (One answer might be that his big mistake is thinking that he can improve Christmas.) Sally tries to warn Jack but he doesn't really listen to her. Why? How does Jack's desire to do something new and different cause him to lose sight of his original vision about Christmas? (He sees how different the toys are from what he saw in Christmas Town and he goes ahead and delivers them anyway.) When Sally tells Jack that he doesn't look anything like himself (when he is trying on his Santa suit,) how does he react? What is Santa's reaction to getting kidnapped? Is he angry? (No he's just confused and worried about the children who are waiting for him to come.)

Processing (10 min.)

Who Are You?

Pass out copies of Resource #12 and some pens or pencils. Ask the participants to think about what makes them unique? (What makes you, you?) Give them a moment to think about this and then brainstorm some of these personality traits on a flip chart. Invite them to write the traits that make them unique on their handouts. What do they think is their most unique quality or talent? Ask if anyone has ever tried to be something they aren't for whatever reason? How did this work for them?

Closing (5 min.)

There You Go!

To close, ask everyone to rise and form a circle around the chalice. Read (or ask a youth to read) the Closing thought, #686 from *Singing the Living Tradition*, "Go in Peace:"

"Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves
Act justly.
Remember the depth of your own compassion.
Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.
Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers and stint not your hand of charity.
Practice forbearance.
Speak the truth, or speak not.
Take care of yourselves as bodies for you are a good gift.
Crave peace for all people in the world, beginning with yourselves, and go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart."

by Mark Belletini

After a moment of reflection, extinguish the chalice (or have someone else do so), and excuse the youth.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience and have some fun as a group:

More Discussion:

Expand the discussion of Jack's biggest mistake. Did Jack and his friends make the toys

scary just to be mean? Did Jack seem surprised by the reaction to his gifts? What did you think about some of the presents? Which one was your favorite? How about your least favorite? Why was Jack so blind to the fact that he and Sally seem to be so well matched? Have you ever been so focused on something that you missed an opportunity? How could Jack have worked cooperatively with Santa to make Christmas?

More Activities:

Gather some art supplies and make some Christmas toys with a Halloween twist. How would you write the sequel to this movie?

Have the youth group brainstorm possible scenarios for the next part of Jack and Sally's story.

UUnique You!

