

My Mandala - What is your Spiritual Journey?:

Using mandalas to help children learn about their past and current connection to the Divine and to their faith community

In 2017, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions program for children K-5th grade was focused on the theme, "What is your spiritual journey?"

During my research and planning to lead the 4th-5th Grade group, I was somehow led to consider using mandalas to tell a story. Because our children were so young, the theme could have been a tough question to answer. We also had children with special education and behavioral needs in our community. Having kids write or journal answers would have been quite a challenge.

Many cultures around the world use mandalas in various ways - as prayer, as a blessing, as cultural story-telling, as a meditative tool, as calendars, as oracles, etc. We could lead the children in make their own mandalas and using them as a way for them to show via a picture rather than tell with words what their spiritual life has been thus far. A clever set of queries would need to be developed to help them get to the answers they seek. Most kids did not know what a mandala was before walking into my classroom, but all left with a deeper knowledge of themselves and their journey.

Resource book: Mandala Book: Patterns of the Universe, by Lori Bailey Cunningham (ISBN-10: 1402762909), <https://www.amazon.com/Mandala-Book-Patterns-Universe/dp/1402762909>

Introduction to Mandalas:

- Explain what are mandalas, what cultures and peoples have used them, and how have they been used in the past and present?
- Show examples of mandalas (religious, art, nature).
- Show mandala video (9 minutes long): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdUFqkX2d6I>
- Explain how we will be using them today in our time together.

Ask Queries:

Materials: Printout of queries so children can see them and reference them as needed.

Have a brief conversation with full class or break into smaller groups to ask each other the following queries about their life and their experience of God. Use the image of a compass as a guide, ask the following questions:

- ❖ Thinking about the East (or right side) of your mandala: What do you THINK about God/the Divine?
- ❖ Thinking about the South (or bottom) of your mandala: How does God/the Divine MOVE you?
- ❖ Thinking about the West (or left side) of your mandala: How does God/the Divine make you FEEL?
- ❖ Thinking about the North (or top) of your mandala: Where do you FIND God/the Divine?
- ❖ Thinking about the area and the Spirit that surrounds/circles all of these: How do you SHOW God/the Divine to others? or How do you SHARE God/the Divine with others?
- ❖ Now thinking about the Center of your mandala: What would be a good symbol of or for YOU?

Making a personal mandala:

Materials: Mandala frame for each child lined with sand on bottom (shoe boxes with low sides, round or square plastic “to-go” containers, wooden frames with bottoms attached, etc.), small bowl for carrying supplies, various art supplies (colored sand, rice, dry peas, colorful lentils, small pastas, glass or clay beads, popcorn, shells, stones, tumbled glass, small scraps of tissue paper, etc.). Note: Alternatively, you may go on a nature hike to glean materials as children walk (stones, felled sticks, blades of grass, fallen leaves, shells, flowers, etc.).

- When ready, children can work on/create their own personal sand mandalas reflecting upon questions that were asked and what they already know about themselves & their mundane or spiritual life journey thus far.
- Give each child a “mandala frame” with sand lining to bottom.
- Give each child a bowl to glean & carry art supplies from main supply table to their working area.
- Welcome children to supply table already full of various art supplies already set out.
- Children can share their creations with the rest of the class if/when there is time and attention for this.

Create a full classroom mandala:

Materials: Good size sandbox with sand at the bottom (such as a Godly Play sandbox), various art supplies already set out, small bowls for children to glean & carry supplies.

- Settle children for quiet worship. When led, encourage children to think about the class, our journey together, and us as a community.
- When it is appropriate, welcome children to go back to supply table and glean items that remind them of their thoughts, feelings, and leadings regarding our class, the time we have spent together. You can also encourage them to bring an item or two that represents themselves in our classroom.
- Allow children to come back to sandbox with sand and either work all together adding items to classroom mandala or taking turns one by one to contribution to creation.
- If there is time, go around circle and welcome children to share what they added/ included in our classroom mandala, if they are so led. Can gently ring a small bell in between each child/person’s contribution to help with transition to next person and their sharing,

(Closing) Human Mandala game:

- Students, teachers, assistants, and anyone that helped with creating classroom mandala, lay down on ground in a circle with either feet or heads touching or somewhat close to each other.
- Hold hands together, touch feet together... make a human kaleidoscope of our classroom.
- Have someone extra to take picture of the beautiful Human Mandala everyone has created!
- For more info and an example of this exercise: <https://www.deepfun.com/mandala-game/>

FINAL NOTE: It may be important to take a picture of each child’s mandala. Encourage children to take home or appropriately dispose of their mandalas with a small blessing or prayer as you all see fit.

***Lesson created and developed by Stacy Schanno, July 2017
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Children’s Sessions***

CENTER:

A symbol of
you!



EAST:

What do you
think about
God?



SOUTH:
How does God
move you?



WEST:

How does God
make you feel?



NORTH: Where do you find God?



SPIRIT:
How do you
show
God to others?



SPIRIT:

How do you
share
this with others?

