

Shaking Out the Truth



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Shaking Out the Truth

Lessons on How Quakers Conduct Their Business for Kg-12th grade

The lessons in this packet were created by a dedicated group of Friends, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Children and Youth at Annual Sessions Group, to prepare children and youth for the March 1998 sessions. The three lessons highlight how Quakers make decisions in a large group or with two or three people. Each lesson begins with a section for the teacher to provide a background about the Quaker process. For the students, questions and games or crafts are used to introduce the lesson, the Quaker process is then tried, and stories or activities done to reinforce the lesson. Although activities are suggested for specific ages or grades, many suggestions are appropriate for use by First Day school with a wide age range.

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We are grateful to Carol Wright for helping us put all our ideas into an attractive and understandable whole. If you have questions or need more information call Marty Smith, Executive Secretary for the Religious Education Concerns Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, at 1-800-220-0796, ext. 7008.



Picture designed by the American psychologist E.G. Boring.

Shaking Out the Truth: How to Hold a Threshing Session

Background for the Teacher:

How Wheat is Threshed: First the farmer spreads several bundles of wheat on a wooden floor of his barn which must have tightly-fitted boards or hard-packed dirt so no kernels can fall through the floor to the room below. Then he farmer uses a *flail*, a club-like tool with a wooden handle attached with a link of chain or a leather hinge to a long stick of wood. As he swings the handle down, the attached piece of wood whips down into the wheat stalks, breaking the wheat seeds off the stalks and cracking the husks, called the *chaff*, from the kernels. Then the farmer *winnows* this mixture of wheat hay, chaff, and seeds. On a breezy day, he tosses the mixture into the air and lets the waste, the lighter hay and chaff, blow away, while the heavier kernels of grain fall back onto clean bags to save for next year's planting.

What a Threshing Session Is: Friends use the process of threshing sessions or meetings when there is an issue about which there is much disagreement, uncertainty, or discomfort. When Quakers *thresh*, they apply the friction of divergent ideas to a concern in order to determine what the real issues are. The aim is not to gather ideas that agree with or support one another, but to allow the differences of thought and viewpoint to thresh out the truth of the matter. What falls away (the chaff) is unimportant or irrelevant to the issue; only the precious kernel of truth remains. Occasionally it becomes obvious that more information is needed before the issue is brought to business meeting for decision, so a committee might be formed to work on the issue.

How Threshing Sessions Work: As in Meeting for Business, the clerk has an important role as moderator. Unlike Meeting for Business, the clerk does not try to help the meeting find unity or the sense of the meeting. Like in a Meeting for Business the clerk tries to be sure that all voices are heard, providing sufficient time to think through, or pray over statements. The clerk should be ready to draw out Friends who may have expressed doubts or opinions in private but hesitate to speak in Meeting for Business. He or she may ask knowledgeable Friends to bring information that may enrich the threshing meeting. Among the side issues and irrelevancies, and, occasionally, short tempers or hurt feelings, Friends try to hear one another and search for the heart of the issue being considered, the kernel of truth.

Topics or Issues Which Might Be Threshed:

For young children:

- What snack can we have?
- What game can we play?
- What do we do if brother or sisters won't share?

Elementary, Middle School, High School:

- If a classmate is being picked on or talked about, what do we do?
- Should we tell on someone who is stealing or cheating?
- Are school uniforms or dress codes a good idea?
- How to respond to bullying (parents could be part of this, too)

All ages:

- Responding to homelessness
- The death penalty
- Should we always tell the truth?
- Protesting war by not registering
- Ways to spend money which has been given to the meeting
- Should aid be sent to Iraqi children?
- Should Quakers ever use violence?
- How much of meeting for worship should children (young people) attend and when?
- How could meetings more fully integrate adolescents into their community?

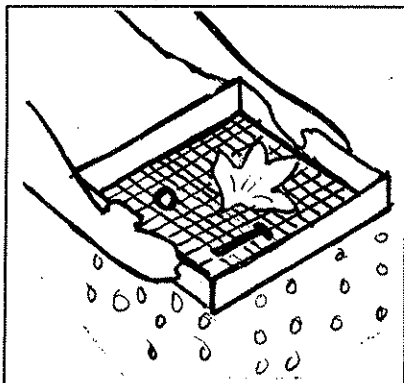


Lesson 1
Shaking Out the Truth: How to Hold a Threshing Session

Introduction:

1. Explain in words that your age group can understand, how a threshing session works.
2. Compare it with threshing wheat, showing pictures from this curriculum if that is helpful.
3. Do one of these pre-threshing session activities to get your group ready:

Shaking Out the Kernels (elementary): Provide a square or round sieve with a wood or wire frame for each person in the class, like an archeologist's sifting screen. Before class begins add little interesting bits of shells, beads, leaves, rocks (and other objects to make the mix interesting) to a dirt or sand pile outside the meeting house. Ask children to use their sieves and gently shake out the sand or dirt, noticing what remains in the sieve and what falls through. Those objects which remain are like the kernels of wheat or the gem of the truth that come to light when all the views have been sifted through and heard. The holes in the sieve can be likened to the silence in which we listen to others' viewpoints or spaces where the Light can shine through (the larger the holes the more light can get through).



Seed Collage (elementary): Use the seeds which have been collected in the sieve (the kernels) to make collages.

Finding the Treasure (elementary): Add food coloring to sand (black works well) and stir carefully so that it is well mixed. Fill a clear milk bottle with the colored sand. Drop a large shiny, brightly colored piece of costume jewelry (a ring, necklace setting, or a large fake pearl) into the sand. Put a lid on the bottle and shake the "gem" or "gems" into the colored sand. Slowly pour the sand into a strainer. As children eagerly await the hidden "treasure", talk about the need to patiently listen to and sift through many ideas in threshing sessions in order to get to the "gem" of the truth.

The Picture of a Woman (upper elementary, middle, high school and adults): Ask students to look at the picture on page 1 and silently decide what they see. After all have contemplated the picture, ask for a volunteer to share what he/she saw. Then ask if anyone else saw the same thing or saw something else? Ask if anyone saw both the older woman and the young woman? Explain that the reason Friends hold threshing sessions is because not all people see an issue from the same perspective. Hearing another perspective gives a broader understanding of the truth which is often multifaceted.

Think Again (middle, high school, and adults) *:

1. Identify one side (or corner) of the room as "yes"; opposite side as "no"; and the center as "unsure".
2. Pose a question to the group, perhaps one of the aforementioned issues listed on the first page of the lesson.
3. Ask each person to move to a part of the room that corresponds to their present thinking on the topic chosen.
4. Ask each of the three groups (no, yes, unsure) to huddle among themselves (for about 10 minutes) and identify five reasons why they think as they do. Ask them to identify a volunteer to be a spokesperson for the group.
5. Gather everyone's attention. Explain that all should listen to each group's spokesperson with an open mind and "think again" about the topic.
6. When each of the spokespersons have spoken, invite everyone who would like to change their physical position on the continuum to do so now (moving from "unsure" to "yes", "no" to "unsure", etc.).
7. Discuss the importance of listening with an open mind, testing, reasoning, and rethinking.
8. Draw the relationship of this activity to *threshing sessions*.

* This activity is an adaptation of a Children's Creative Response to Conflict activity

4. Go over the steps for holding a threshing session which have been posted on a flip chart or poster board:

Holding a Threshing Session

1. Choose a clerk: the teacher could choose a young person, or the group could choose a clerk (but that could consume most of a class period), or the teacher can be the clerk or moderator and model the threshing process.
2. Choose someone to take notes
3. Choose the issue to be discussed
4. Clerk explains briefly the process of *threshing* a concern
5. Clerk states the problem or issue
6. Group considers the issue in worship
7. Clerk calls for relevant information on the issue
8. Clerk calls for questions which clarify the issue
9. Clerk asks for those who would speak for and those who would speak against the issue
10. Clerk asks if those who have not yet spoken would like to do so
11. Clerk calls for silence, restates concerns, reminds friends to listen and not to respond directly to viewpoints
12. At the conclusion clerk states what the kernel of the issue is and where it should be taken from here

Hold the threshing session

Follow up activities:

Debrief the threshing session: what went well? what parts of the process were difficult?

Read a Bible Story (elementary): or tell the parable of the sower from Mark 4: 3-9 or Luke 8: 4 - 15 or from the *Parables of Jesus* by Tomi de Paola (in the PYM library)

Winnow the Wheat (elementary and middle school): Use a whisk, large wooden spoon, or mallet to “beat” on stalks of wheat gathered from a field or purchased in a craft or fabric store. Collect the chaff (seeds and cracked husks) and the wheat kernels in a large shallow wok-like bowl or basket. On a breezy day, go outside and pivot the bowl slightly upwards and back and forth (in a rocking motion) so that the chaff is lifted up and taken away by the wind and the kernels remain (see illustration).



Chew Wheat Gum (elementary - middle school): Before the session, purchase wheat kernels (available at health food stores). Put the wheat kernels in one's mouth for a minute to moisten them; then chew. What does this have to do with threshing? Threshing was dusty work. To keep their mouths moist and relatively clear of dust, farmers often chewed on a handful of grain. Chewing activated a substance in the grain called gluten, turning the mass into a gum-like wad. Children helping out in the field often stripped a handful of kernels out of the wheat to chew on. How is this related to threshing sessions? During

those sessions Friends really need to “chew” on the issue or problem to glean the essence of truth they are looking for.

Standing in Another's Shoes (elementary - high school)*: This activity provides an opportunity for practice in listening to and paraphrasing another point of view.

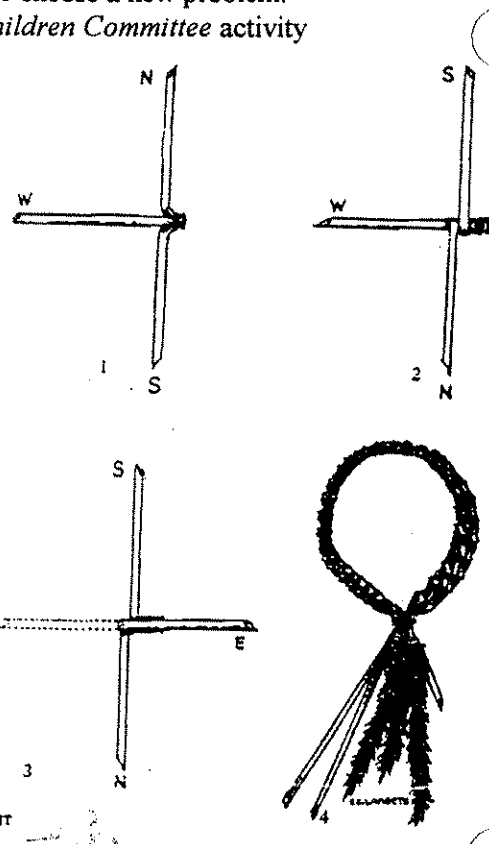
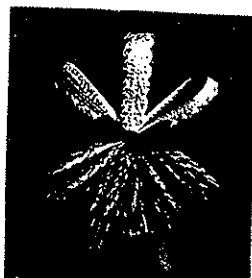
1. Cut out pairs of construction paper shoes in different colors. Present a conflict or issue with at least two sides (the list of issues on page 1 might be helpful).
2. Ask for two volunteers to step in shoes facing one another, each presenting a different side of the issue.
3. After each has presented, ask them to switch and stand in the other person's shoes and paraphrase what the other person said or felt.

4. After doing so, each checks in with the other to see if they got what the person was trying to say. They can then add to or correct the paraphrase. (This is an important step because sometimes what we think we are saying it is heard differently.)
5. Continue the process using the same issue, with different viewpoints or choose a new problem.

* This is a *Non Violence and Children Committee* activity

Straw Plait Decoration (elementary - high school): This decoration is made from stalks of wheat, which can be purchased from a craft store or clipped from a wheat field (with permission of owner). Straw can be easily trimmed into short lengths, about 12" is manageable, and braided to form festive shapes. A useful braid can be made by plaiting with two, three or four straws. Tie them together just below the ears and, with the ears hanging down begin braiding. This is a very simple plait. Work with three straws as shown in the diagram, remembering always that each straw must return to its original place if the plait is to retain the symmetry which forms the attractive pattern.

Use a three-plait favor to display your plaits. Double each plait on itself to form a loop and tie over the existing ties. Lay the three loops side by side and tie all three together tightly just above the heads so that the plaits at the sides spread from the center. Attach a raffia hanger on the back; trim the front with ribbon or bittersweet for an attractive door or tree decoration.



THREE STRAW PLAITS

Resources:

- A Pioneer Sampler: the Daily Life of a Pioneer Family in 1840*, Barbara Greenwood; Ticknow and Fields Books for Young Readers, 1995.
- Faith and Practice*, North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1986. (available from PYM library)
- The Parables of Jesus*, Tomi de Paola, Holiday House, 1987. (available from PYM library)

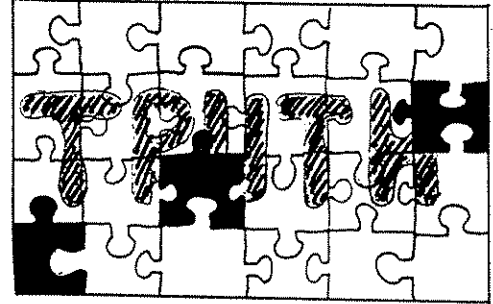


Written by the Committee for Children & Young People
at Yearly Meeting (CYPYM), December, 1997.

Fitting the Pieces Together: How to Hold a Meeting for Business

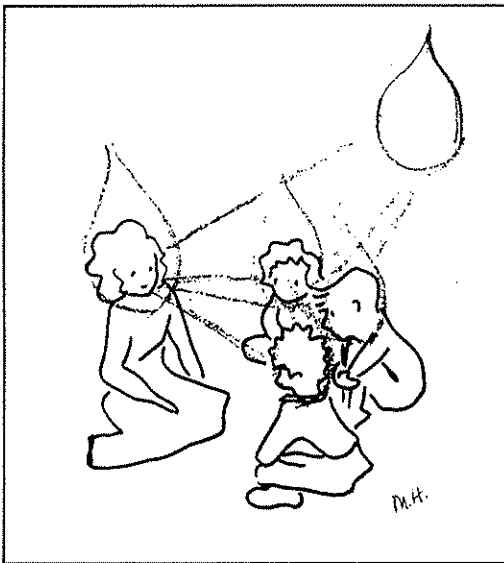
Background for the Teacher:

What Meeting for Business Is: It is *meeting for worship with a concern for business* which is focused on specific matters * (Tom Brown, MFB). It is conducted in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as meeting for worship * (PYM faith and practice, 1997). It is the place where Friends are able to take their faith, the things they believe in, and put them into action. It is where Friends search for a greater truth or for a solution better any one person could come up with. Friends are supposed to come the meeting not with an “ax to grind” or their minds made up but open to the guidance of the Spirit. Through speaking, silent prayer, quiet waiting on the Light, each person contributes their piece of the Truth into the complete picture within the solid frame of worship. Business meeting takes what we express in worship (our faith) and puts it into tangible works. Even though boring or intelligible to some Friends, meeting for worship for business is a very important tool for making our faith visible.



How Meeting for Business Works: Like in a *threshing session*, there is a clerk, who tries to get as many Friends as possible to bring information to, or speak for and against, the issue under consideration. Unlike the *threshing session*, the clerk tries to capture the “sense of the meeting” and to see if Friends are “in unity” or agree about a how to solve a problem. This is unlike the way school classes, clubs, or businesses make decisions, which is often by using *Robert’s Rules of Order* and/or by voting. Many businesses or corporations work toward consensus when making decisions, but it is not very likely that a Higher Power or a Greater Source would be called during that process.

Who Does What in Business Meeting: The clerk makes up an agenda (based on what Friends say needs to be done),



goes through the agenda in a timely manner, keeps Friends focused on what needs to be done, makes sure each person’s voice is heard, shushes a Friend who has said too much or has spoken too often, restates what the “sense of the meeting” is or has another Friend say it, asks for approval, calls for attention to the Spirit when the Truth has yet to be uncovered and keeps Friends searching for an answer, until one is found (this could take months or even years). A clerk who has a strong feeling or opinion about the issue is not allowed to say it because such an expression might sway the meeting in one direction. The recording clerk’s job is very important: to take “notes” on the business that takes place, to sum up any actions taken, or decisions made, in the form of a written *minute*, which the clerk may ask to be read back for the meeting’s approval (or not). The recording clerk may be asked to forward the meeting’s minute to the quarterly or yearly meeting to let those Friends know how the monthly meeting feels about an issue. Every Friend in meeting has responsibility to share his or her own Light or Truth as it comes to them, to speak only if no one else has stated their point of view or presented their particular solution, to keep everyone focused on the topic, and

to pray for Light to guide the meeting’s search for an answer.

What Is Brought to Business Meeting: *Old or unfinished business* (reports or decisions carried over from the previous meeting), reports or recommendations from committees needing the action of the whole meeting, *leadings* or *concerns* from individuals or groups within the meeting, or issues which have been *threshed* and are ready for decision.

Lesson II
Fitting the Pieces Together: How to Hold a Meeting for Business

Introduction:

Note: This lesson will take two or more weeks: one or more weeks to develop the theme and one week (45 minutes or 1 hour) devoted to conducting an actual children's meeting for business.

1. *Ask:* Can you remember what a *threshing session* is? What do Quakers use it for? (This is a form of review, for students who are here today to get students absent last week up to speed.)
 2. *Explain:* This week, we are going to be learning this week about how Quakers take care of their business; that this is probably different from how you make decisions in school or when you are with your friends.
 3. *Ask:* When you are with a group of friends, how do you decide what you are going to do? How do you choose what to do? Does everyone have a say? *
 4. *Ask:* Do you ever ask someone else for help with a difficult decision or choices? Do you ever ask God for help? *
 5. *Ask:* Do you know how Friends try to make decisions? *
 6. *Explain:* Based on what students say they already know and their age (and as briefly and simply as possible) explain how Friends make decisions. Include that we ask for God's help in making our decisions and that we don't vote. Try to explain why. *
- * A good explanation can be found in *Growing in the Light, 2nd to 5th grade*, p. 11, PYM, RE Committee.
7. Do one of the following pre-business session activities to get your group ready:
 - Read or tell the story (preschool - elementary):

Blind Men and the Elephant

Many hundreds of years ago a king and his army traveled across the high mountains of India to impress the common people with his wealth and power. But best of all was that the king had a huge elephant, whose size and strength awed the land.

One day the King's entourage set up camp outside a small village in which every inhabitant was blind. At night several of the blind men stole into the camp, hoping to discover the truth about this extraordinary creature so that they could share this knowledge with their blind neighbors. Upon returning to the village, they began relating with excitement the facts that they had gathered:

"It is large and rough," said the blind man who had touched the elephant's ear, "and it moves in the breeze like a heavy canvas tapestry"

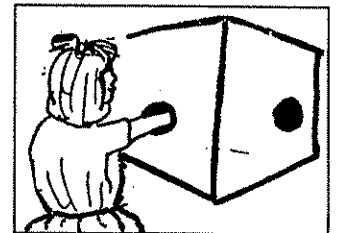
"No, no, that is not at all the case," interrupted the blind man who had felt the elephant's trunk. "It is, in fact, like a powerful, rough-skinned snake that coils and uncoils but does not strike."

"I beg to differ", said the blind man who had touched the creature's legs, "for it is solid and firm like a tree with rough, furrowed bark."

Ask: Had the three villagers felt the elephant? Did they all feel the same part? Do you think they were impressed by how powerful the King was by feeling the huge elephant which he owned?

- **I Know What It Is** (pre-school and elementary): (Note: This activity reinforces or builds on the story of the *Blind Men and the Elephant*)

You need a large object, like a stuffed animal, which is not easily identified by only touching one part without seeing it and a box large enough to hold the animal. Place the box on a table so that it opens up. Cut a hole, just large enough for the hand of a young person to get through, in the 4 vertical sides of a large cardboard box. Put the mystery object in the box making sure it is placed equidistant from all sides of the box. Close the top of the box and wrap or tie it up like a present (leaving the side holes open). One at a time, let each child reach through a hole and touch the object and then draw the part that they felt. When everyone has touched it, ask each one to guess what they think the object is; then have one person unwrap the box. Explain that we each thought we knew what the object was because of the part we touched. In meeting for business, each person has a little part of what the solution or right way of doing something is. When we put together what each person thinks with what everyone else thinks, we can come up with what the whole picture is or the best way of doing something.



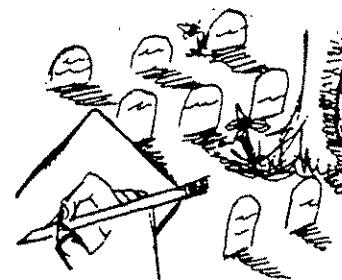
- *Choices (early elementary)*:*

Children stand in the middle of the room. Begin with choices such as: "Which would you rather be, ice-cream or cake? Blocks or tricycles?" Designate sides of the room for each choice. Move on to harder issues in which neither choice is really appealing as in: "Would you rather be a biter or a slapper?" Other ideas: "Would you rather clean your room or go to bed early?" or "Would you rather share your toys or keep them locked away? Make up alternatives relevant to the age you are teaching. Let the children talk about their choices. Do you think about others when you make your choices? Do you ever ask your parents or God for help when you are making hard decisions? *

* adapted from For the Fun of It, Marta Harrison, Friends Peace Committee.

- *Cemetery Corners: (elementary - middle school):*

To do this activity, it helps to have a cemetery near by. Each student stands at a corner of the graveyard. (If the cemetery is not a rectangle or square, all the better because there are more perspectives from which each child or young person can view the cemetery). Give each one a notepad or a blank piece paper (with something hard to write on). From their corner of the cemetery, ask the students to draw a rough sketch or a list of what they see. After 20 minutes, bring the class together to compare notes or drawings. By piecing together sketches or reading each list of observations, challenge the class to come up with a description of your meeting's cemetery. Emphasize that it takes the whole class to make a complete picture of what the cemetery. This is just like meeting for business where each person's perception is only one piece of the whole Truth. We must look and listen carefully to find get the whole picture.



8. *Go over the steps* for holding a meeting for business which have been posted on a flip chart or poster board.

Holding a Meeting for Business *

(from *Teaching Quaker Faith and Practice to Children*, PYM RE Committee)

1. The meeting opens in worship
2. Out of worship, the clerk presents an issue
3. Anyone may speak about the issue
4. Sometimes there is silence between the speakers to listen for the Spirit beyond the words.
5. After all viewpoints are stated, the clerk tries to summarize what has been said.
6. If there is a decision made, and Friends seem to agree, the clerk asks if this is "the sense of the meeting".
7. There is time for comments on what has been summarized.
8. When the clerk feels there is agreement, s/he asks for approval. If there is approval, the recording secretary writes the decision in the form of a *minute*. There is no voting or show of hands.
9. If someone feels strongly that the decision is wrong, s/he can block the decision or stand aside after saying why s/he must speak against it.
10. If there is not agreement, Friends can wait a week or two, or until the following month, to address the issue again.
11. Meeting for worship with a concern for business closes with handshakes all around

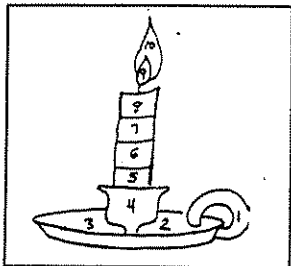
Choose a Topic which your class wishes to discuss (If there is not a "hot" issue which the class is eager to deal with, ideas for topics are in Lesson 1, *How to Hold a Threshing Se*

Follow up activities:

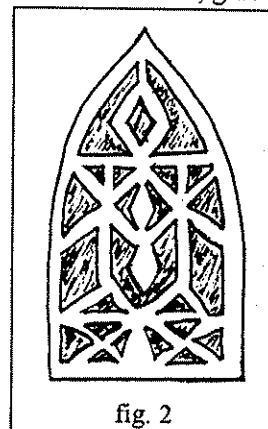
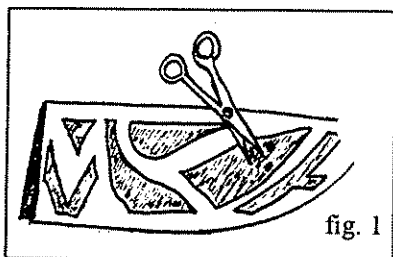
Debrief the meeting for business: ask what went well? What parts of the meeting were very difficult? If a decision was made, does it need to be taken to the adult's meeting for reporting or action?

Read a Bible story or tell the story of Elijah on Mount Sinai (elementary - middle school): Found in I Kings 19: 3-15, this story is about a prophet or man of God, named Elijah, who ran away in the wilderness to escape his enemies and responsibilities. After experiencing a very strong wind, an earthquake and a fire, Elijah finally listened to God, and he did what God requested. In meeting for worship and in meeting for business we need to listen to God (Friends call this the Inner Light) as God helps us know what is the right thing to do. (Teaching note: Children might enjoy bombarding Elijah with the "elements" as the story unfolds, i.e.: a fan for the wind and rattling aluminum foil for the earthquake)

Looking for the Light (elementary - middle school): Draw the outline of a candle, at least 1 1/2 feet tall, in an old fashioned candle holder. Precut pieces of a candle, flame, and a candle holder out of colored paper (see drawing). Number the pieces; the number does not matter, but have at least one piece per child. Older elementary and middle school will find the reassembling the candle more challenging without numbering the pieces. Help younger children paste the pieces together on a piece of poster board. If you have a large class, make two separate candles. The idea is that, in meeting for business, we each have a piece of the Light; everyone's piece of the Light helps the whole group decide what is best to do. In addition, we are seeking a greater Light which adds to our individual and group flames.



Stained Glass Picture (elementary): You will need black construction paper, several colors of tissue paper, scissors, and glue. for young children: tear tissue paper into small pieces (about 1-3 on a side). With glue that dries clear, glue different colored pieces of to white (fairly transparent) paper, wax paper, or tracing paper. Overlap the pieces to produce blended colors, waiting until the glue dries after each application. With transparent tape, hang the pictures up against window panes. For older children: fold a rectangular piece of black construction paper in half lengthwise. You may wish to round off the top third of the folded rectangle to make an arch (see fig. 1). Leaving a solid border and center fold, cut out areas through which light can shine. Gently remove the excised pieces of construction paper and unfold the paper (see fig. 2). Cut pieces of tissue paper to fit the "stained glass" window openings. Glue the tissue paper to the back of the



cutouts, overlapping colors to form blended colors. As each one is viewing their finished windows, explain that like our windows we each receive and transmit Light differently. As individuals we are sometimes better able to listen to our Light and transmit it than at other times. In meeting for worship for business, if we let the Light shine through each of us, we can see what the "right way" might be and create a complete and beautiful picture.

Resources:

Faith and Practice, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1997.

For the Fun of It, Marta Harrison, Friends Peace Committee, 1975.

Growing in the Light K to 1st Grade, Reichardt and Caldwell, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee, 1997.

Growing in the Light, 2nd to 5th Grade, Reichardt and, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee, 1997.

Teaching Quaker Faith and Practice to Children, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee, 1997.

When Friends Attend to Business, Tom Brown, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1975.

Written by the Committee for Children & Young People
at Yearly Meeting (CYPYM), January, 1998.

Figuring Out What to Do: Using a Committee for Clearness

For where two or three are gathered together, there I am in the midst of them.
Matthew 18:20

Background for the Teacher:

What a Meeting for Clearness Is: The first thing many of us think of when we think of clearness committees is that it is something overseers or worship and ministry committees do. Or you may have heard of committees for clearness for separation or divorce. However, increasingly Friends are using the clearness process to make a life-changing decision like: what job to take, whether to change careers, or whether to follow a *leading*. The CYPYM Committee thinks that this process can also be used by children and young people for hard decisions they face in meeting, in school, or in their own families. A *clearness meeting* relies on the Inner Light, which is available to all, and on each person as a channel of Divine Guidance who draws out the Inner Teacher in the focus person. *Clearness committees* are like *meetings for business* and *threshing sessions* because each has a clerk and recording clerk to keep the meetings focused and moving forward. Like *meeting for business*, all people in the group help the focus person decide what is the right decision or path. Like *threshing sessions*, *meetings for clearness* look at all sides of a problem and all of the alternatives. Unlike the other two Quaker processes, *meetings for clearness* require confidentiality and try to help only one or two people reach a decision rather a whole group

How Meetings for Clearness Work: The person who has a decision to make gets together a group of friends who listen, ask clarifying questions, and offer their wisdom, if asked. The focus person looks for people whom he or she trusts and who will offer objective, honest, loving guidance. The clearness committee gathers in a quiet uninterrupted space for a specified period of time. Out of a worshipful, searching silence, the dilemma is presented. Then the group asks unloaded, probing, open, clarifying questions to help the person "in a muddle" to look at the alternatives and possible consequences. After all the questions have been asked and following some silence, the clerk asks the focus person how they would like to proceed: with more questions, advice, shared images, etc. Depending on whether or not the focus person has figured out what to do, more *meetings for clearness* may be necessary.

Who Does What in Meetings for Clearness: The focus person suggests the people he or she would like to have on their *clearness committee*, and either the clerk or the focus person asks people to serve. Before the meeting, the focus person writes out the dilemma and reads it at the beginning of the meeting. He or she does not have to answer the questions which the committee poses. When the focus person has reached a decision, he or she lets the committee know what is needed. The clerk's job is to gather the small group, to keep the group focused, to make sure each person has a chance to speak, to be sure the questions are helpful, and to figure out if the group needs to meet again. The recording clerk, writes the questions and responses and hands them to the focus person when the session is over. (From *The Clearness Committee* by Parker Palmer, 1988, *Faith and Practice of Pacific Yearly Meeting*, 1985 and *Living with Oneself and Others*, New England Yearly Meeting, 1985, and notes compiled by Jan Hoffman.)

Dilemmas or Decisions Which Might Need Clearness:

For elementary children

- Whether to exaggerate or tell the truth when you tell your friends about a contest you were in
- Whether or not to tell the teacher if you see someone cheating or stealing
- Whether or not to tell on oneself or someone else
- Whether or not to tell a friend you don't like him or her anymore
- Whether or not to go to a party given by someone you don't like
- What camp to go to in the summer
- What sport to play or extra curricular activity to sign up for.

For middle schoolers

- What to do about a friend you saw shoplifting or cheating
- Whether or not to change the way you look or act to fit with the "popular" group
- Which sport to be in, which instrument to learn, or which extra-curricular activities to be in
- What to do about physical or sexual abuse reported directly to you by a friend

For high schoolers

- Which college to go to
- Whether or not to go to college right after high school
- Whether to take a low paying summer job you enjoy or to take a job which pays well.

Lesson III

Figuring Out What to Do: Using a Committee for Clearness

Introduction:

Note: The clearness process is one which children and young people can use when they are facing tough decisions. But it takes a lot of time to listen, to reflect and to help another person sort things out.

1. *Ask:* Can you remember what *meeting for business* is? What do Quakers use it for? (This is a form of review to get students who were absent up to speed). What is a *threshing session* for? How is it different from *meeting for business*?
2. *Explain:* This week we will learn how one or two people can make a very difficult decision with the help of people who care about them. The Quaker process is called a *committee for clearness*.
3. *Ask:* Was there a time when you did not know what to do? When you had a difficult decision to make? When? What was the decision? How did you do it?
4. *Ask:* Do you ever ask someone to help you when you can not figure out what to do? Who? Do you ever ask God for help?
5. *Explain:* "Quakers have a way for helping people who are having trouble making a decision. It is called a *committee* or *meeting for clearness* and this is how it works." (Explain the process in simple terms and as briefly as possible) Be sure to include: "This way of making decisions depends on each of us looking for Inner Light or God just like when we have *business meetings* or *threshing sessions*".
6. Do one of the following pre-clearness activities, depending on the age of your class.

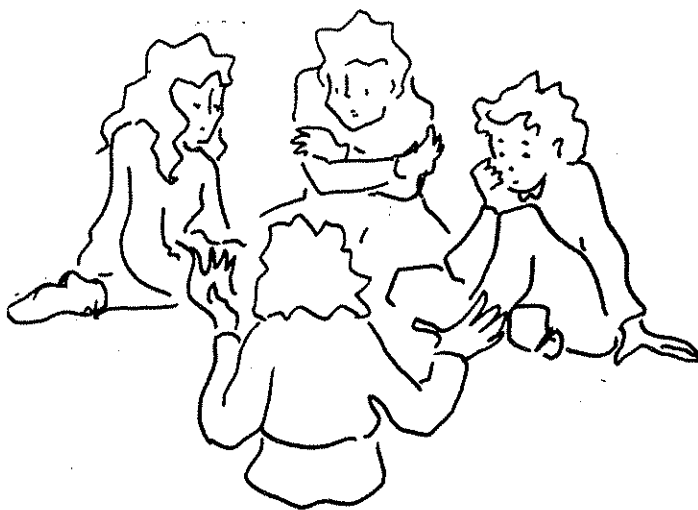
Note: Committees for clearness may be too difficult for 3 to 6 year olds to do. But there are certain concepts essential to the process which young children can understand: settling down, clearing out busy thoughts, listening for the Inner Light, listening beyond the words and noise to ourselves and others, and having others help us when we are trying to make a decision. The activities which immediately follow are good for young children, who may not be ready to learn the clearness process.

Young Children and Early Elementary

Sing: "Quiet Moments" p. 9 in *Songs of the Spirit* or "It Is in Everyone of Us" by Pomeranz. The melody can be found on the *John Denver and the Muppets, A Christmas Together* album.

It Is in Every One of Us

It is in everyone of us to be wise.
Find your heart, open up your eyes.
We can all know everything
Without ever knowing why
It is in everyone of us by and by.



Listening Deeply: The point of this exercise is to practice blocking out distractions and listening beyond the noise to what is inside each person. This is helped by other parts of our body being busy.

Materials: a piece of clay for each person and a tape recorder. Give each child a piece of clay and ask them to roll it around, to soften it, and to form it into whatever they wish. Play some soothing background music. Ask them to work with the clay without talking to one another and to try to listen beyond the music and concentrate just on shaping something with the clay. When they have worked for 10-15 minutes, ask class if they heard the music while they were working. Ask if they heard anything else and to describe it. Ask if it felt like their hands were doing what their bodies wanted them to? The purpose of this is to give the class a chance to experience a quiet space when their minds can be quieted and listen to the deeper Voice.

Settling Jar:

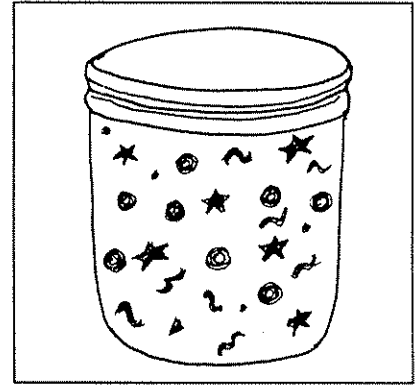
Materials Needed: baby food jars, clear plastic medicine bottles with lids (like ones for cough medicine), or 10-12" slender bottles with cork stoppers, glycerin (available from a pharmacy or garden store which carries supplies for flower preservation) and marbles, sea-shells, rocks, sequins, or glitter.

Directions: fill the jar or bottle one third full of glycerin. Choose some marbles, shells, beads or sequins and put them in the jar (do not fill the jar more than two thirds full at this point, or you will not be able to enjoy the movement of the objects in your jar when you are done). Fill the jar or bottle with glycerin to within one half inch of the top. Seal the jar with a hot glue gun by putting the hot glue on the inside edge of the lid or cork and then quickly screw on the lid or inserting the cork. Let the container dry for about 10 minutes.

Variations: color the glycerin with one or two drops of food color or add a quarter inch (or slightly more) of mineral oil to the top of the glycerin (it will float on top), being sure the air space at the top of the jar is still about one half an inch.

Variation for 3 - 5 yr. olds: use a zip lock bag filled from a large container of pond or stream water which has been collected ahead of time. Make sure the water has sediment as well as the clearer water; pour a little in each child's zip lock bag, or give each child a zip lock bag and walk with them to a nearby pond, stream or lake to collect stirred-up water. Zip the bags as tightly as possible.

In the classroom, ask the youngest children to gently shake their plastic bag back and forth (holding with both hands where the bag is zip locked) and hold it up to watch the pond water settle out. For the older children who have made settling bottles or jars, have them turn the containers upside down and then upright to watch the objects gently settle to the bottom. The main idea here is that the liquid clearing up is like what happens when we try to clear our heads in order to decide what to do. Sometimes friends ask us questions to "shake us up", a bit and sometimes our minds and hearts are so full of "stuff" that we can't see clearly. By being still and listening to our Inner Voice, we can get clear about what we are to do.



The Affirmation Interview: To reinforce the importance of listening carefully, like what needs to happen in *clearness committees*, and asking the right questions.

A small group of children or young people gather in a circle. In the center is a person who is being interviewed. One by one people in the group ask the center person factual, simple and non threatening questions. Examples are: What is your favorite subject? Favorite color? Do you have a pet? The child being interviewed can decline to answer if the question is not appropriate. All in the group listen carefully. After the interview is complete, the teacher asks if one person can describe the person who has been interviewed. If there is time let each child be interviewed and each have a chance to summarize. *

* Adapted from a Creative Response to Conflict Activity in *Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet*, New Society Publishers, 1988, available from the PYM Library and FGC.

Elementary and Middle School

Three Part Listening: This exercise concentrates on listening very carefully for the facts, thoughts, feelings, or values in what someone says. Some values would be: beauty, courage, equality, love, loyalty, and excitement. These are the kinds of things to listen for in order to help a friend reach a decision.

Directions: divide into groups of four. The first person talks about an upsetting classroom or family situation or about someone who annoys them. The second person listens attentively for feelings; the third person listens for values expressed or inherent in the sharing. and the third person listens for the facts or thoughts expressed. Using an egg timer or a watch, the first person speaks for three minutes. The three listeners, in succession, say back what they heard, checking for accuracy. Do this twice using different speakers, or three times if time permits. (Adapted from *Alternatives to Violence* lesson.)

The Lighthouse Game: The purpose of this game is to show how our friends can help us find our way, and that the Light is available to us all if we just listen for it. Students spread themselves around the room. In the room are two

players: a lighthouse and a stranded sailor. The lighthouse is near the center of the room, beaming out and directing the stranded sailor. The sailor is blindfolded and represents a sailor whose ship exploded in a storm. The sailor is spun around and let go. He/she attempts to get to the lighthouse for safety. The players clap their hands as the sailor nears their part of the "ocean" warning him or her of rocks or a shipwreck. The Lighthouse guides the sailor by calling out directions like, "swim two strokes to the right", etc. As soon as the sailor reaches the lighthouse, he becomes the lighthouse, and the lighthouse chooses another player to be the sailor. *

* Thanks to Donna Gibson, Woodstown Meeting, for refinements of this game.

A Run Through: To help children know what kinds of questions to ask, make up a scenario based on one of the dilemma's listed on page two and tell it to the class. Ask the children to write on 3 by 5 cards one question to help a child make such a decision; i.e. a factual, "yes" or "no," or a clarifying question but no opinions, advice or loaded questions. Each child reads their question with the class deciding its appropriateness for the clearness process. Second round: a child (the focus person) makes up a situation which requires a decision and writes it on a 3 x 5 card and then reads it to the class, after which each writes a clarifying question.

Problem-solving Grid: Using a dilemma from the list on page two, ask the class to list all the aspects of the situation. As you discuss the problem, make a grid with the aspects of the problem vertically on the left. Horizontally across the top, list the possible consequences of each action.

To tell or not to tell on someone who cheats		
Choices	Possible Consequences	
	It's my friend	It's not my friend
If I tell	~~~~~ ~~~~~	~~~~~ ~~~~~
If I don't tell	~~~~~ ~~~~~	~~~~~ ~~~~~

High School

Question Quest:

One person is in the middle of a circle, sitting in a chair. The person in the middle presents a question, a situation, or a decision they are facing. Out of silence a person in the circle poses a question which seeks facts, feelings or values. The person seated in the middle answers questions as they are posed and as he or she feels comfortable. A recorder notes questions and answers, summarizing them at the end for the person in the middle to think about.

7. Go over the steps for holding a meeting for clearness:

- | Steps for a Meeting for Clearness | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. | Choose a clerk and recording clerk |
| 2. | The committee settles into worship, waiting on the Inner Light |
| 3. | Out of the silence, the focus person reads the dilemma the committee can help with |
| 4. | Out of the silence, one by one, each asks a question which will lead the focus person to find their own Light |
| 5. | The clerk makes sure that the right kinds of questions are asked, the focus person can choose not to answer any question. |
| 6. | After a time, the clerk asks how the focus person would like the group to proceed: more questions, silence, offer advice, etc. |
| 7. | The recording clerk takes notes on the questions and answers |
| 8. | After deciding whether another meeting is necessary, the meeting for clearness closes with silence. |

Note: Meetings for clearness can be done more informally, with one child or young person choosing 2 or 3 friends he trusts who will ask honest, but caring questions to help figure out what to do. Confidentiality and a quiet space are important for this to work. If possible, children or young people need to be able to say who they trust or feel comfortable with. The smaller the groups the better.

8. Hold a *meeting for clearness*
9. Debrief the clearness committee. What went well? What didn't go so well? How might this process be used in school or at home with your family.

Resources:

Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet, New Society Publishers, 1988.

Living with Oneself and Others, New England Yearly Meeting, 1985: notes compiled by Jan Hoffman.

The Clearness Committee, Parker Palmer, 1988.

Faith and Practice of Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1985.

Written by the Committee for Children & Young People
at Yearly Meeting (CYPYM), February, 1998.