

Second Week: The Children's Story Lesson

Theme: Understanding rituals, symbols, and values

1: Ice Breaker

Sit in a circle and, using a talking stick or other neutral object, ask group to take turns pantomiming an activity that they do daily, like brushing teeth, walking the dog, or praying. Discuss this in terms of a ritual or habitual activity. Ask: Are there things that you do everyday that you don't understand why you do them?

Frame discussion: We will be talking about rituals, symbols, and values in our discussion of The Children's Story.

2: Passage from the book

Have a volunteer read the two page exchange between Johnny and the new teacher about roll call.

3: Discussion

Why is roll call typically done?

Beyond the function, is there any value to roll call? What is the value of it?

In the book, what does the new teacher say about the value of roll call?

Why did the students so easily accept her value statement as truth/fact? (Reference to the earlier discussion of truth, fact, and opinion)

What is the value you assign to the ritual action you pantomimed earlier?

In addition to activities and rituals, there are other things to which we assign values, such as symbols.

What is a symbol that is discussed in this book?

What does the American flag stand for? Review symbolism.

Follow up responses with "What does it mean in your life? What does it mean to you?"

How would you describe Johnny in the beginning of the book?

How does he change by the end of the book?

Who do you learn your values from?

Who do you model values for or teach?

4: Closing activity/for further reflection

One by one, ask each person to begin walking (or clapping) at their own rhythm and pace. It can be a silly walk or skip, something unique. After everyone has joined in, notice if the group begins to fall into synch.

Ask: How difficult was it to maintain your individuality?

This activity illustrates how much effort it takes, on a daily basis, to maintain and exercise your individual freedoms and rights. But if we value our freedom of thought and individual right to expression, we have to understand on a personal level what our symbols, rituals, and values are.

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