

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. An essential component of moral development is the planned sequence of Rites of Passage.
2. True learning communities enable their members to embark on worthy endeavors.
3. True learning communities foster accountability among their members to foster high moral development.
4. Establishing companion relationships with one or more people who can help build your strengths and not feed your weaknesses is an essential element in learning to persevere.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define “Rites of Passage” and express an understanding of how it applies to them.
2. Describe how they will foster mutual accountability after leaving this class.
3. Desire to invest more energy in the personal value of building true friendships.
4. Be commissioned from where they are at the end of this curriculum into a new quest in the next season of life.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This type of celebration has been a wonderful experience for the students (and teachers). Choose whether or not to invite the parents.

You have arrived at the last planned lesson of this curriculum. It is time for you to help your students bind the remaining principles and concepts to the truths previously studied, practiced, and acquired. Like the strings wound together in Lesson 4, a cord of many strands is not easily broken. You have presented much information, modeled traits of high moral character, established meaningful relationships, and provided a safe place for your students to be nourished and strengthened. Now it is time for them to leave your tutelage and “live the lessons” in new surroundings and different circumstances, and within a new community.

Your students have come to the threshold of a new season in life. It is time for a rite of passage. You will affirm them, encourage them, and send them off with a blessing and new quest for each of them to begin. You will commission them to pursue great things as young men and women of integrity.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

In the Box: An overall letter and three individual notes from the grandmothers.

- Students' Personal Journals.
- Paper for each student to write a letter of one or two paragraphs.

In preparation for this lesson, there are several items you will need to do well in advance:

- Write a summary statement for each student in which you clearly describe how he or she contributed to the learning community. In which areas did you see the most growth? Recall a specific story that reveals how a specific character trait was involved or a life changed dramatically from before. If you have it available, use a type of paper (such as certificate paper) that will signify that it is a notable achievement worthy of honor. You will present the statements to each student at a special gathering.

Here are some examples of what you may want to write:

"Tanya has developed a positive attitude toward her classmates, demonstrated by her choice to become a reliable, trusted member of our classroom community. She now comes to class ready to learn and allows other people to help her when necessary."

"Ivan began the school year resistant to talking about issues related to drug use, fearing we were accusing him of being an addict. He has made a public commitment to stop using illegal drugs and now can see that his goals and dreams are attainable."

"Sasha has maintained a consistently moral high standard for himself since the beginning of the school year and has been an excellent role model for his peers. He continually finds ways to encourage his classmates with sincere words. He notices when someone is hurting and looks for ways to help."

"Yelena expressed no hope for the future when she first arrived at school. She has admitted that she still has some concerns about circumstances that are out of her control, but she has set academic and personal goals this year and she has achieved most of them. Most importantly, she has reestablished a good relationship with her father and talks to him regularly. She smiles on most days now."

- Arrange for an evening at your school, a restaurant, or a place where you can have a special gathering of students dressed in holiday wear. Plan to have someone take photographs of the event.
- Prepare a speech in which you express the importance of sending out each student blessed and prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead. Include the principles of responsibility, accountability, and integrity, and the need for guiding principles of truth as the essential element to being young men and women of high moral character.
- Be sure to include a description of how the various elements of the curriculum contributed to the success of the program. Describe how the use of stories guided the lessons and related discussions. Explain how the Personal Journals provided a means for recording special moments of decision-making and choices about the difficult issues related to the use of drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex. Emphasize that the development of a healthy community is founded on trust, forgiveness, and hope. List some examples (be sure to ask the affected students' permission ahead of time) of events that happened in the classroom that inspired the growth of the sense of community. Plan time for the students to voluntarily share some of their stories, Personal Journal entries, or testimonials with the audience. Notify them the day before and get some volunteers.

- If you decide to invite the parents, you may decide to put up a series of display stations in your classroom or an area of the school auditorium showing various activities the students have produced during the sessions, such as:
 - The Mysterious Box (whole course)
 - Grandmothers' Letters display (whole course)
 - Goal Posters and Dream Posters (Lesson 2)
 - Airplanes (Lesson 3)
 - Poster display of Drugs unit
 - Mousetrap (Lesson 6)
 - Coke® experiment (Lesson 7)
 - Poster display of Alcohol unit
 - Choosing a Mate display (Lesson 16)
 - Media posters (Lesson 24)
 - Quiz station for parents
 - Other stations the teacher chooses

Some of these stations listed will require students to make posters for the stations. Others you will already have. Use your imagination to add to these ideas. We present them here as a guide for you. You could assign pairs of students as guides for parents to explain what each station shows and what they have learned in those sessions. The materials for some other stations you will already have from your classes.

You may want to keep these displays to show parents as you introduce the course to them next year.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Today, we are gathered to celebrate the wonderful year we have had together. It has been my privilege to have your children as my students.

As you may know from your discussions with your children, throughout the year we have been reading a series of letters from the grandmothers of three fictitious students – Natasha, Dima, and Sasha. In the story, the grandmothers wrote the letters to help their grandchildren navigate the life choices that lay in front of them. The grandmothers’ desire was to help them avoid the dream breakers and more readily achieve their life dreams. In the story, Natasha, Dima, and Sasha have been taken through their Grandmothers’ Letters by their teacher. Now, we will hear from all of them one more time before they say goodbye.



STORY

[Read the following story.]

Natasha and Dima waited in the hall for Sasha before going into the classroom.

“I guess today will be the last of our grandmothers’ box and the last of their letters,” said Natasha.

“Funny, never thought I’d be sad to see it end.” said Dima.

“What about Sasha? His grandmother died two years ago. Think how he is feeling. Must seem a bit like having his grandmother back from the grave only to lose her again,” said Natasha.

“What are you two talking about?” asked Sasha, strolling up.

“Exploring our feelings about this being the last session with our grandmothers,” said Natasha.

Tatyana Alexandrovna opened the classroom door at that moment and motioned them inside. “We have a lot to cover before it’s over.”

“Your grandmothers planned everything, the box, the letters, to take you – us – to this moment,” said the teacher.

“This is their last letter to the three of you,” she said as she opened it. “There is no date on it, but it must have been written shortly before your grandmother died.” She looked at Sasha as the last words were spoken. “The closeness of Ludmilla’s death may well have prompted all three to finish their experiment within the boundaries of time and space.”

“Yeah, I’ve never understood what they meant by that stuff about getting around space and time!” said Dima.

“It will all be explained in the letter,” said Tatyana Alexandrovna as she took a deep breath and began to read:

Dear Ones,

We three are rather sad that this day has come – we wonder how it is affecting you. For much of this year, we have reached across time and space through these letters to say what we’ve left unsaid when face to face with you. We’re so glad that we undertook this experiment, and we have prayed that our effort would be of great help to you in seeing your dreams come true.

Do you remember our first letter to you? It started by saying, “It all began easily enough; we would be exceptions to the rule. Our dreams would come true . . .” As you now know, we weren’t as wise as we thought. But we’re convinced that it can be different for you. You can see your life goals and dreams come true, especially if you come home to the Father as we finally did.

This is our time of celebration. You did it! You stayed with us through all the games, memories, object lessons, questions, and riddles. All of it was to prepare you for the Rites of Passage that present themselves in this season of your lives.

As you now know, the problems surrounding drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex run much deeper than the obvious physical and social consequences, terrible as those can be. These things can kill your heart to all the wonders that life holds.

They can also attack you as a person – your true self, who you really are – that part of you we love most and which your Heavenly Father wants to prepare for an eternity with Him. It is so easy to lose oneself in the midst of all the false selves that we pour so much of our energies into, in the false hope of earning our acceptance – a total waste of time, if you ask us.

We have asked a lot of your teacher in this final time together. Rite of passage requires a number of things to successfully capture what has been gained. Our final task is a most pleasant one – our blessings of affirmation on you, our dear grandchildren.

“Dear Natasha,

I can’t think of you without seeing your determined chin thrust slightly forward like you were leaning into the wind. I see more in you than simply a collection of your mother and father. There has never been another exactly like you and there never will be. You have a unique place to fill in this life and the next. Though there are a thousand things I would like to say, all that’s really necessary is this – God is very fond of you. You will never find Him with His arms crossed or His back turned. He will always keep you in the corner of His eye and the center of His heart.

May your life be blessed with the heart knowledge that you are the apple of His eye.

All my love,

Your Grandmother,

Yelena”

“Dear Dima,

Life hasn’t been easy for you. Your father’s alcoholism robbed you of his strength and presence. But a deep wound like that doesn’t mean that God is withholding His love from you. Quite the contrary. He allows wounds because they are the surest way to the heart. You already know life isn’t safe, but the question is, do you know that it is good? I think you do. It is kind of like God Himself. God is completely good, but I wouldn’t think

anyone who truly knows Him thinks of Him as “safe” or merely “nice”. The point is, I bless you and so does your Heavenly Father. You are blessed with hope and healing and help when you need it.

This is my prayer for you,
Your Grandmother,
Olga”

“Dear Sasha,

Strange to write you this letter. There is a very good chance that I will not be there when you read it. Oh, how I wish I could have seen your smile as you worked your way through the obstacles and lessons we planned. So many times I all but told you of our experiment! I don’t suppose I’ll get to watch you fall in love for the first time. Or offer you some tangible comfort when you suffer your first broken heart (even though it will feel fatal, it won’t be). So many tears and laughter we two won’t share. I’d even hoped to one day see your children. But all of this will have to wait until another time and place, if God grants my prayers on your behalf. This we do share – our love. Love always wins, and you, my sweet Sasha, have truly been loved and are loved still by the One Who matters most. May you find your way home very soon – if you haven’t already done so. I’ll be waiting.

Love,
Your Grandmother,
Ludmilla”

[Give the speech that you prepared. See the TEACHER PREPARATION section for some general suggestions.]

ENDING THE LESSON

[It is now time to give each student the special note you have written to them. Hand each note to each individual student.]

[It is now time for you to close the evening and say goodbye to the grandmothers, Natasha, Dima, and Sasha . . . as well as to your students and parents if present.]