



Soul Matters

Choosing Hope

In the Middle
December 2025

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Reminders About Packet Design & Usage

To get the most out of our RE packets, we encourage users/leaders to periodically review the key components of our approach and packet design:

Our Building Block Approach: We designed these packets as a “toolbox,” not a curriculum. In other words, we don’t give you a rigid flow to follow. Instead, we offer you a bunch of activities and options (i.e., “building blocks”) for you to create a lesson plan that best fits your youth and your setting.

Leader Notes: Throughout the packet, we offer tips and reminders to support and guide leaders. We identify these leader notes using *purple font and italics*.

Note about Session Sections: The sections of each session are designed with a whole-body approach in mind. In other words, each section engages a different aspect of the spiritual experience and multiple intelligences. Here are those sections, as well as the symbols that identify them:

Spirit - Light It

Chalice Lighting



Mind - Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thought Sharing



Body - Explore It

Creative Activities, Fun Games, and Spiritual Practice



Heart -Discuss It

Storytelling & Personal Sharing



Take It Into The World

Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives



Welcome to Choosing Hope!

Welcome to the December “In The Middle” *Soul Matters* Packet for middle school youth on **Choosing Hope**.

The month of December has a special place in my heart, and its accompanying holiday decorations have an equally large place in my basement, as I decorate so that my whole house *drips* with the holiday spirit. I admit that I deck my halls with sixteen differently themed Christmas trees. There is something magical both about this month that is a doorway to a New Year and lighting up the longest nights with twinkling lights or candles.

In this month's packet, we want to light up each week with a different spark of hope.

Session One: **Hope and Choosing to Create the Light for One Another**
Session Two: **Hope and Choosing to Trust that It Will Work Out**
Session Three: **Hope and Choosing to Look in the Unexpected Places**
Session Four: **Hope and Choosing to Begin Again**

This month's theme invites us to look at how we actively choose to be hopeful in different ways. This year in *Soul Matters*, we are seeking to explicitly tie our sessions to our UU Values and to sprinkle them with wisdom from our UU ancestors. This month we will be learning about **Lewis Latimer**, who lit up the world with electric filaments; **Albert Schweitzer**, humanitarian and philosopher; and **Charles Dickens**, author of *A Christmas Carol*. In addition to **Choosing Hope**, we will be lifting up stories on Hanukkah and the Winter Solstice.

I am especially excited about our inclusion of Charles Dickens this month. I am a huge fan of *A Christmas Carol* and collect different editions of the story. My favorite character in it is Fred, Ebenezer Scrooge's cheerful nephew, who is the ultimate symbol of **hope** in *A Christmas Carol*. While others are frightened of Scrooge or have written him off as a bitter, miserly old man, Fred continually shows up and greets his uncle with warmth, love, and forgiveness. Despite being told no repeatedly by his uncle, Fred trusts that he will eventually say yes to his invitations, hoping that one day Uncle Scrooge will choose love and family over loneliness. Fred shows us that **hope** is not only trusting that things will work out, like our Session Two theme, but it is believing in someone and holding a light for them, even when they don't see that possibility yet for themselves. And finally, after Scrooge's transformation, Fred chooses to begin again with his uncle, like our Session Four theme.

With all this in mind, I was thrilled to include Fred and his holiday celebrations in a game in our Session Three. If you have time to get to the movie recommendations this month with your youth, I highly recommend watching a version of *A Christmas Carol*, as it so perfectly ties together each of our weekly themes in **Choosing Hope**.

I also looked forward to sharing the Hope Jar Ritual as a countdown for Epiphany in the Spiritual Practices in Session Four. My own family fills jars with resolutions for the New Year, and over the Twelve Days of Christmas, we gather together each night to choose one of our unread resolutions and put it in a fire, until we are left with our final hope and individual theme for the New Year.

As Fred said, “I have always thought of Christmas time ... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time.” May this time of year for you be as such, and may it be filled with **hope** of all varieties.

Liv Radue,
on behalf of the entire [Soul Matters Team](#)

Session One:

Hope and Choosing to Create the Light for One Another

Theme Angle

This entire month, we are exploring some of the different ways we can choose hope. This week, we lift up how we choose hope when we create light for each other. This will give us an opportunity to celebrate the inspirational UU **Lewis Latimer**, who literally created light for us. It will also give us the chance to engage with the beloved UU quote by **Albert Schweitzer**: “At times when our own light goes out, it is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

***Leader Note:** Invite youth to volunteer to read and light the chalice each week. More information about Albert Schweitzer may be read [here](#).)*

Today our chalice lighting is from our **UU Ancestor Albert Schweitzer**, a humanitarian, theologian, philosopher, organist, musicologist, physician, and scholar famous for encouraging the ethical philosophy of “Reverence for Life.” As we read his words, may we remember to be a light for others.

“At times when our own light goes out, it is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



Lighting the Darkness

Suggested Introductory Words

(Consider showing this video: [Lewis Latimer: Hidden Genius Who Lit Up the World \[3m30\].](#))

This week we are talking about hope and, more importantly, how hope is something we can create for one another. When things may feel particularly dark, it helps when someone else shares their light with us, whether that be through an act of kindness, a smile, a hug, etc.

UU Lewis Latimer literally helped create light for others. Latimer was born in 1848 in Chelsea, Massachusetts to parents who escaped from slavery. Though he grew up without many opportunities, he taught himself mechanical drawing and went on to become an engineer and inventor alongside Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. He improved the design for carbon filaments in light bulbs, allowing them to last longer and shine brighter.

He once said, “We create our future by well improving present opportunities,” and his story reminds us that even when the world feels dark, we can choose hope and be a light for others.

So, with that in mind, let's begin with our first question of the day.

In a time of darkness, who or what has been a light to you?

(Pause and allow time for the youth to answer.)

Explore It

Creative Activities, Fun Games, and Spiritual Practice for Experiential Learning



Here are a variety of suggestions for digging deeper into the theme. We suggest that you pick 1 or 2 of these activities that you feel best suit the needs and interests of your group.

Creative Activities

Lanterns for Latimer (15 minutes)

This can be done with any even number of youth.

Prep It

Gather for each youth a paper lunch bag and a battery-powered tealight. Gather for the group scissors, hole punches, and markers.

Optional: Gather colored tissue paper and glue sticks if you would like to make stained glass lanterns.

Consider having a speaker or other means to stream the *Soul Matters* **Choosing Hope** playlist from either [Spotify](#) or [YouTube](#) while the youth are working.

Set It Up

This week we are making lanterns to celebrate our **UU ancestor Lewis Latimer**. Thanks to him, lightbulbs could last hours instead of minutes, bringing light into countless more homes. We can all create light for one another. Sometimes when our personal lights seem a little dim, someone else helps us to shine more brightly. In addition to being for Lewis Latimer, these lanterns are for all of those who bring us light.

Do It

- Cut shapes of various types and designs into the paper bags. Youth can also use different types of hole punches.
 - They may want to fold or bend the bag slightly to cut out complex shapes like snowflakes.
- Decorate the bags with markers.
 - Optional: Glue pieces of tissue paper over the openings on the inside of the bag to make a stained-glass effect.
- On one side of the bag, have youth write the names of people or things that have brought hope and light into their lives. They may also draw symbols or icons for these people or activities.
- Add the battery-powered tea lights inside the bags.
 - Consider turning off the lights or shutting the blinds to admire the lanterns all together.
 - Optional: Have each youth name aloud one or more of the people or things that bring them light in the darkness.

Sparking the Flame Collage (15 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Cut out flame shapes in construction paper for each youth. Gather scissors, glue sticks, and old magazines.

Set It Up

As Unitarian Universalists, we recognize the power and importance of lighting a flame, as do many faiths around the world. Each week, we light a flame for a thought or idea we want to uphold. Today we are going to create flames for those things that bring us hope and light.

Do It

Cut out images from the magazines that represent things that bring us hope or light up our world and then paste it how you would like on your paper.

Discuss It

Have each student show their collages.

- What are some of the things in your collage that bring you light?

Games

Pass the Light (10 minutes)

This activity works best with 5+ youth.

Prep It

Consider Gather a battery-powered tea light or a flashlight. Have a way to play and stop music.

Do It

- Have the youth sit in a circle.
- They will pass around the lit battery-powered tealight or flashlight while the music is playing and will stop when it stops, like when playing the game Hot Potato.
- When the music is stopped, identify who is left holding the light or flashlight.
- Before play can restart, someone will need to say how the person holding the light brings light to the group.
 - Ex: "Alisha, you tell the best jokes."
 - Ex: "Theo, you are a really great artist."
- If you haven't had the light stop on each person when your allotted time for this activity is done, have something said about each person remaining.

Glowing Freeze Tag (10 minutes)

This activity works best with 5+ youth.

Prep It

Gather several glowsticks, at least one per youth. Have a large space where running is possible, preferably one where the lights can be dimmed. Crack the glow sticks right before playing.

Set It Up

Hope grows as we pass it on and are a light for others. In this game, we are going to literally pass on the light until everyone is lit up.

Do It

- Choose someone to be the “It” and give that person all of the glow sticks.
 - If you have a very large group, you may choose two people and split the sticks between them.
- Have everyone run in the darkened space (safely).
- If someone is tagged, the person who is “It,” gives them a glowstick.
 - Version 1: Once you have a glowstick, you are safe and no longer need to run.
 - Version 2: If you are tagged, the person who is “It” gives you half of the remaining glowsticks, and you are now also “It.”
- Play ends once everyone is lit up.
 - Alternative: If you want longer game play, you can make the game last until everyone has 2 or 3 glowsticks, depending upon how many sticks you have.

Find the Light (10 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather several glowsticks. If you do the Glowing Freeze Tag game, you may use the same ones. Hide these glowsticks in a dim room. Set up a central chalice bowl.

Set It Up

Our theme today has been about being the light for someone else. In this game, we are going to work as a group to find the light.

Do It

Version 1:

- Have the group go into the room where you have hidden all of the glowsticks.
- Every time someone finds a glowstick, they must place it in the central chalice bowl.
- Game play ends when all of the glowsticks are found.

Version 2:

- Choose a youth or a pair of youth to go into a room and hide all of the glowsticks.
- Once they are done, have the rest of the group go into the room to find the glowsticks.
- Every time someone finds a glowstick, they must place it in the central chalice bowl.
- Game play ends when all of the glowsticks are found.
- Allow another youth or pair to go re-hide all of the glowsticks.

Closing

Once all of the glowsticks are in the chalice bowl, reread the chalice lightening words from our **UU Ancestor Albert Schweitzer**. “At times when our own light goes out, it is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lit the flame within us.”

Spiritual Practice

Guided Candle Meditation(10 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Utilize your already-lit chalice or gather a candle and a lighter or matches. Consider having a way to play soft, instrumental music.

Do It

- Have the youth sit in a circle and find a comfortable position for their bodies.
- Dim the lights if possible.
- Use the following script or make up your own:
 - Everyone take a deep breath in . . . and let it out.
 - And again, in . . . and out.
 - We are going to read once again our chalice lighting words: “At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”
 - I invite you to close your eyes or to let your vision go unfocused.
 - Think of someone who has given you light. Maybe they are someone who has made you laugh, who has cared for you when you have been sick or injured. Someone who you can tell your troubles to. Someone who has always made you feel your best. *(Pause for youth to think.)*
 - Picture them in your mind and how they have brought light to your world.
 - What do you remember about that moment? How did it make you feel? *(Pause for youth to think.)*
 - Now think about how you might be a light to someone else. How could you make someone’s day brighter and more filled with hope? *(Pause for youth to think.)*
 - When you are ready, open your eyes or refocus your vision on the flame of our candle.
 - Look at the flame and remember, that even when our light grows dim, we can rekindle our flame again with the help of one another.

Discuss It

Storytelling & Personal Sharing



Reflection & Discussion Prompts

Leader Note: We suggest that you read through these questions and pick 2-3 questions that will best engage your group.

Suggested Script

(Consider watching this video on the [Yi Peng Festival](#) with floating lanterns [1m20].)

At different times of year, all around the world, people hold lantern festivals and festivals of light. One famous festival is the Yi Peng Festival in Thailand. People write messages of hope or love or wishes on their lanterns and release them into the sky in a large group. Even one lantern rising into the sky casts a beautiful light, but when they join together, it is magical and makes the night sky shine even more.

- If you could write a message of hope on a lantern, what would it say?
- When you imagine lots of rising lanterns, and thus raising hopes and wishes, what would that feel like to see? Have you ever witnessed something similar?
- What is unique or distinctive about “your light”?
- How do you hope your light helps others?
- Why do you think the message of bringing light to the darkness is so universal?
- How will you share your unique light this week?

Take It into The World

Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives



Check Out: Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives

We suggest ending the lesson with this “choose-your-question” checkout. Invite each youth to choose one of the 3 questions below as a way of articulating what they got out of the lesson today and how they might bring that learning/gift/insight/challenge into their everyday lives. These questions are the same for every session, so we suggest making a poster to hang in your youth space, so it becomes part of your closing ritual.

Questions

- What is one thing that *surprised* you about today’s lesson?
- How did today’s lesson *challenge* you?
- What learning or *insight* from today’s lesson do you want to carry with you into days and weeks to come?

Session Two:

Hope and Choosing to Trust that It Will Work Out

Theme Angle

This month, we are exploring some of the different ways we can choose hope. This week, we lift up how hope can be found when we make the choice to trust that it will work out. We all find ourselves in times where our well is drained, we have run out of steam, we have run into a dead end, and we can't see the path forward. In these seemingly hopeless moments, we can find hope by reminding ourselves that we can trust life to help us out. This session gives us a chance to live into our UU practice of finding wisdom in the world's religions, and in particular, lift up and be inspired by the Hanukkah story.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

Leader Note: *Invite youth to volunteer to read and light the chalice each week.*

Our chalice lighting today is a famous quote about Hanukkah from Robert Altinger.

"The darkness of the whole world cannot swallow the glowing of a candle."

As we light our chalice, may we think about the light each one of us brings into the world.

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



Hanukkah: Having Hope Through Trust

Suggested Introductory Words

This week we are talking about choosing hope through having trust that things will work out, even when it is hard to see how.

In the story of Hanukkah, the Jewish people were in a situation that felt impossible. Their temple was damaged, and when they went to relight their sacred lamp, they discovered there was only enough oil to last a single day. Instead of giving up, they lit the lamp, having hope that things would work out. And a miracle occurred. That single day's worth of oil lasted for eight days. That's why each year when Hanukkah is celebrated, candles are lit to remember the miracle and that hope came from trust.

So, with that in mind, let's begin with our first question of the day.

What was a time when you didn't know if something would succeed, but you tried it anyway, and it turned out okay?

(Pause and allow time for the youth to answer.)

Explore It

Creative Activities, Fun Games, and Spiritual Practice for Experiential Learning



Here are a variety of suggestions for digging deeper into the theme. We suggest that you pick 1 or 2 of these activities that you feel best suit the needs and interests of your group.

Creative Activities

Light in the Dark (10-15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Gather black or dark colored construction paper and light-colored gel pens or chalk.

Set It Up

Today we are going to create an art piece that reminds us that light can shine even in the darkest moments. A lot of our world holidays at this time of year focus on light. We are approaching the longest night of the year, but with it comes the promise of the return of the light. Many of these holidays are a reminder that even when things feel at their darkest, the light will return.

Do It

- The black or dark paper will represent the night sky.
- Using the light-colored gel pens or chalk, the youth should draw what source of light there could be: constellations, the moon, planets, shooting stars, lanterns, fireworks, candles, or whatever shines for them.
- Have those who would like to share their art pieces and explain any symbolism to the group.

Invisible Ink Art (15-20 min, may take a break in the middle) (Adapted from [Little Bluebirds](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Have on hand white paper, water, baking soda, ground turmeric, hand sanitizer, paint brushes, and mixing containers. *(Note: Turmeric can stain.)*

Set It Up

Today we are going to do an art project that is going to be difficult to see at first, but we are going to trust that it will work out in the end.

Do It

- Slowly add water into a teaspoon of baking soda in a container, and combine until you have a runny paste.
- Use the paintbrush to paint, splash, or dab the paste onto a sheet of white paper. As it is white on white, it may be tricky to see what you are painting, but trust the process and have fun.

- Optional: You can have the youth draw whatever they want or ask them to draw a hope or wish for the season.
 - Variation: Have the youth draw something for another person in the group, and then they will reveal what that person wished for them.
- Let it dry for ~10 minutes, and rinse out the container as you wait.
- Put a dollop of hand sanitizer into the clean container and add a sprinkle of turmeric, then mix with the paintbrush to combine.
 - Remind youth to be careful, as turmeric can stain.
- Use the paintbrush to paint the turmeric paint over the page. The areas painted with the paste will turn bright rust-red against a bright yellow background.

Discussion

- In what ways can hope, love, or kindness be like invisible ink in the world?
- When has something in your life become clearer only after time passed?
- Hanukkah celebrates light that lasted far longer than anyone expected, how might that connect to messages we can't see at first?

The Oil That Lasts Jars (10-15 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Gather baby food jars or other small jars or glass votive holders, plus battery-powered tea lights, one per youth. Have different colors of tissue paper, scissors, white glue, paint brushes, and paper towels for clean-up.

Set It Up

The Hanukkah story reminds us that light can last longer than we expect, and that even when things seem dark, hope can keep shining. Today, we are going to make our own “oil jars”: candle holders made from tissue paper and glue. The bright colors will let light shine through, just like the lamps in the Hanukkah story.

Do It

- Tear up or cut the pieces of tissue paper.
- Coat the inside of the jar or candle holder with white glue.
- Place the pieces of tissue paper on the glue.
- Let dry for a couple of minutes, then paint over the tissue paper with white glue.
- Insert the battery-powered tea light.
 - Remind students that because the paper is on the inside, they should never use a real flame in this candle holder.

Games

Dreidel (10 minutes) (Taken from [My Jewish Learning](#)) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity, especially if many of your church elders could teach the game to younger generations.)*

This game works with any number of players.

Prep It

You will need dreidels, and an equal number of game pieces per player, usually around 10-15. You could use pennies, tokens, chocolate chips, raisins, candy, etc. If your dreidels don't have written translations on them, you may want to print these rules as a cheat sheet.

Set It Up

(Consider showing [this video](#) from My Jewish Learning about how to play)

Playing with the dreidel is a traditional Hanukkah game played in Jewish homes all over the world, and household rules may vary. Dreidels have four Hebrew letters on them, and they stand for the saying *Nes gadol haya sham*, meaning “A great miracle occurred there.”

Do It

- Give each person their 10-15 game pieces.
- At the beginning of each round, every participant puts one game piece into the center “pot.” In addition, every time the pot is empty or has only one game piece left, every player should put one in the pot.
- Every time it’s your turn, spin the dreidel once. Depending on the side it lands on, you give or get game pieces from the pot. For those who don’t read Hebrew, some dreidels also feature a transliteration of each letter. If yours doesn’t, use the photo below as a cheat sheet:
 - a) *Nun* means “*nisht*” or “nothing.” The player does nothing.
 - b) *Gimel* means “*gantz*” or “everything.” The player gets everything in the pot.
 - c) *Hey* means “*halb*” or “half.” The player gets half of the pot. (If there is an odd number of pieces in the pot, the player takes half of the total plus one).
 - d) *Shin* means “*shtet*” or “put in.” The player adds a game piece to the pot.



- If you find that you have no game pieces left, you are either “out” or may ask a fellow player for a “loan.”
- When one person has won everything, that round of the game is over.

Discuss It

- Do you have any stories of growing up playing Dreidel with your family?
- Do you play other types of games with your family at this time of year?
- What are some of your favorite winter traditions with your family?

Obstacle Trust Game (15-20 minutes)

This game works best with 4+ youth.

Prep It

Gather blindfolds and supplies that could be used in an obstacle course. Ex: A 2x4 for a balance beam, rope, cones, cushions, things to weave between, things to step over, things to crawl under. Or you can let your students use their creativity and just grab things from around the space.

Prep It

Today we are going to play a game that lets us practice both trust and hope, as we learn what it feels like to depend on someone else's guidance when we can't see what is ahead of us.

Do It

- Have the youth create an obstacle course through the room.
 - Variation 1: You can set up an obstacle course ahead of class if time is limited.
 - Variation 2: Split the youth into teams and have each team create an obstacle course.
- Have the youth partner up.
- One partner puts on a blindfold.
- The sighted partner must then guide them through the obstacle course using only verbal directions and without touching. Encourage the youth to be as precise as possible. Ex: "Take two small steps forward."
- Then have them switch roles.

Discuss It

- Was it more stressful to be the one guiding or the one doing the obstacle course?
- What did your partner do that made this easy?
- What could have made you trust more?

Spiritual Practices

Dayenu (5-10 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Set It Up

Today we are going to explore the Jewish practice of gratitude. *Dayenu* is a Hebrew word that means "It would have been enough." We typically sing this word during the Passover Seder, but it also fits our weekly theme of trust, and it connects to hope as well. *Dayenu* reminds us to notice what we already have and trust that it is enough for the moment. Like in the celebration of the oil that lasted for eight days, we are trusting that what we have is sufficient. When we practice trust like this, it helps us to stay hopeful. Even if we don't have everything that we *want* or know how things will work out, we do have enough to sustain us. Like that little bit of temple oil in the Hanukkah story, what we do have can carry us forward.

Do It

- Have each person say something that is enough for them or what is a blessing they have at that moment.
 - Ex: Having one good friend I can always hang out with.
 - Ex: Planning to see my grandparents next week.

- When each person is done saying their gratitude, have the group as a whole say “*Dayenu*” in unison.

Discuss It

- Why is it sometimes difficult to recognize that we have enough?
- What other benefits are there to realizing that what we currently have is sufficient?
- How is hope connected to gratitude?

Discuss It

Storytelling & Personal Sharing



Reflection & Discussion Prompts

Leader Note: We suggest that you read through these questions and pick 2-3 questions that will best engage your group.

Suggested Script

Now, let's make a personal connection with today's topic of how hope can be found when we make the choice to trust that it will work out.

- When the Jewish people in the temple saw that there was only one day's worth of oil left, why do you think they lit it anyway?
- When you think of a situation where you weren't sure it would work out but you tried anyway, what helped you take that chance?
- Why is it important to realize that sometimes what we have is enough and not to always wish for more?
- When things don't go as planned, what gives you hope that it will still turn out okay?
- What is one way you can be a light for someone or a source of hope this week?

Take It into The World

Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives



Check Out: Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives

We suggest ending the lesson with this "choose-your-question" checkout. Invite each youth to choose one of the 3 questions below as a way of articulating what they got out of the lesson today and how they might bring that learning/gift/insight/challenge into their everyday lives. These questions are the same for every session, so we suggest making a poster to hang in your youth space, so it becomes part of your closing ritual.

Questions

- What is one thing that *surprised* you about today's lesson?
- How did today's lesson *challenge* you?
- What learning or *insight* from today's lesson do you want to carry with you into days and weeks to come?

Session Three:

Hope and Choosing to Look in the Unexpected Places

Theme Angle

This month, we are exploring some of the different ways we can choose hope. This week, we lift up how we choose hope when we look in the unexpected places. This session gives us the opportunity to explore the Winter Solstice's surprising message that hope can be found in the dark and Christmas's surprising message that hope can be found in the outcasts and seemingly powerless. This session also will give us an opportunity to celebrate the inspirational **UU Charles Dickens**, who wrote *A Christmas Carol*, a story of finding hope in the unexpected place of a cold-hearted man named Scrooge.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

Leader Note: Invite youth to volunteer to read and light the chalice each week.

May This Light Guide Us (from [Worship Web](#))

By Rev. JeKaren Olaoya

We light this chalice, here in the darkness of winter as we wait.
This temporary space is one filled with prayers to be answered,
love to be given and received, miracles to be witnessed.
May this light guide us until the light of the sun returns again.

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



The Light After Darkness

Suggested Introductory Words

Today we are exploring what it means to find hope in unexpected places. Around this time of year, the Winter Solstice arrives, marking the longest night and the shortest day of the year. For thousands of years, people have celebrated this time of year as the Earth begins to tilt back toward the light, and the days will soon grow longer.

Question: Can you think of a time in your life when something good or hopeful came out of a situation that at first seemed dark or disappointing?

(Pause and allow time for the youth to answer.)

Explore It

Creative Activities, Fun Games, & Spiritual Practice for Experiential Learning



Here are a variety of suggestions for digging deeper into the theme. We suggest that you pick 1 or 2 of these activities that you feel best suit the needs and interests of your group.

Creative Activities

My Three Ghosts (10-15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather paper, pens, and markers enough for all of the youth.

Consider showing [this trailer](#) of the 1999 Patrick Stewart version of *A Christmas Carol*, which summarizes much of the plot. (2m30) Otherwise, you may want to prepare to give a summary of *A Christmas Carol* to your youth.

Set It Up

Some of our activities this week surround our **UU ancestor Charles Dickens** who wrote *A Christmas Carol*, as well as many other enduring works and social commentaries. Dickens was born in 1812 in England, and many of our Christmas cultural references can be tied to his writing.

Today we are going to imagine we are being met by three ghosts like Ebenezer Scrooge: the Past, Present, and Time Yet to Come. Hope is found by looking honestly at our past, noticing joy in the present, and imagining a hopeful future.

Do It

- Draw a picture or write a few lines for each of the following ghost prompts.
 - If this ghost came to visit you, what would it show you?
 - Ghost of the Past: One happy memory or lesson from before in your life
 - Ghost of the Present: Something in your life right now that gives hope
 - Ghost of the Future: Something you hope for or dream about
- Have the youth share their drawings or writings if they wish.

Solstice Sun Catchers (10-15 minutes) (Adapted from [Woo! Jr.](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather coffee filters, washable markers, a spray bottle with water, and scissors, plus tape to hang your sun catchers. You will also want newspapers, construction paper, a paper plate, or a protective surface to color your coffee filters on. Optional: blow-dryer.

Set It Up

Today we are going to make sun catchers to celebrate the returning light after the Winter Solstice and to remind ourselves that hope often shows up in surprising ways. When the sunlight shines through our colored coffee filters, it creates beauty from something small and simple, just like we can choose to bring color and light to the world around us.

Do It

- Start by flattening out your coffee filter. Then place it on a paper plate or other protective surface.
- Color your filter however you would like. You may also cut shapes out of it or fold and cut it into a snowflake shape.
- When your filter is all colored, spritz it with water. The more you spray, the more the marker colors will start to run and blend together.
- When you are happy with how it looks, set it aside to dry and start another one.
- The wetter the filters are, the longer they will take to dry and may take a few hours.
 - To speed up the process, you could use a blow-dryer.
- When the filters are dry, hang them on your classroom windows.

Games

Scrooge Freeze Tag (10 minutes)

This activity is best with 5+ players.

Set It Up

If your youth are not well versed enough in the plot of *A Christmas Carol*, remind them who Scrooge and Tiny Tim are. Ex: “Tiny Tim is the young and sickly son of Bob Cratchit, the clerk for Ebenezer Scrooge. While other people dislike Mr. Scrooge, Tiny Tim believes he is deserving of Christmas blessings.”

Do It

- Choose one player to be Ebenezer Scrooge and one character to be Tiny Tim.
- Ebenezer Scrooge is going to be “It” in the game, running and tagging players to freeze them.
- A player can only be unfrozen by Tiny Tim.
 - Tiny Tim must run up and perform an act of kindness. He can give a high five, say a compliment, retie a shoe, etc., or he can just state an act of kindness. Ex: “Taking out the trash for someone.”
- After a few minutes, rotate who gets to be Scrooge with someone else in the group. Do the same for Tiny Tim.

Fred’s Parlor Game (15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Consider showing [this scene](#) of Fred and Scrooge from *A Muppet Christmas Carol* to set up the relationship between the two.

Set It Up

While others are frightened of Ebenezer Scrooge or have written him off as a bitter, miserly old man, his happy nephew Fred continually shows up and greets his uncle with warmth, love, and forgiveness. Despite being told no repeatedly by his uncle, Fred trusts that Scrooge will eventually say yes to his invitations, hoping that one day Scrooge will choose love and family over loneliness. When Scrooge is visited by the ghost of Christmas Present, they make a stop at Fred’s house, where he and his friends are playing a parlor game we will play today.

Do It

- Choose a category for the game, like Winter or Holiday Season.
- Select a youth to go first.
- Have that player think of an item or person within that category.
- The other players may ask Yes or No questions about the item or person.
 - Ex: “Is it a person?” “It is smaller than a microwave?” “Is it something you do outside?”
- Once the item is guessed that person becomes the next person to think of an object.

Fezziwig's Dance Party (<10 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

You will need a way to play music and an up-tempo playlist.

Set It Up

When Scrooge goes with the Ghost of Christmas Past, they travel back to Scrooge's days of being an apprentice for Mr. Fezziwig. As opposed to Scrooge, Fezziwig was a generous and joyful boss, wanting his employees to have fun at his Christmas party and to enjoy the season. In the spirit of Mr. Fezziwig who encouraged his employees to dance, we are going to have our own dance party.

Do It

- Put on music for the youth to dance to. Expect to hear some groans.
- In the case of groaning, have the youth call out challenges to one another.
 - Ex: "Dance like you are freezing." "Dance like you are birds." "Dance like you have no bones."
- Hopefully, the sillier the dance command, the more students will engage and learn to be less stiff, just like Scrooge needed to do.

Discuss It

- How did it feel to dance like you were at Fezziwig's Party? Did adding in silly challenges make it easier?
- Why do you think people sometimes feel self-conscious about dancing or expressing physical joy?
- When more people joined in, how did the group energy change?

Spiritual Practices

Sun Salutations (10 minutes) (Taken from [Kidding Around Yoga](#) and [The Art of Living](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

If you are unfamiliar with Sun Salutations, you may want to watch [this how-to video](#) from [The Art of Living](#) (starting at 1min). You may also want to show this video or another one to the students if you would like.

Set It Up

As we celebrate the return of the sun with the Winter Solstice, this week we are going to learn how to do Sun Salutations, or what are known as *Surya Namaskar* in Hindi. *Surya* is the Hindu name for the sun, and *Namaskar* stems from *namas* which can be translated as "to bow to" or "to adore." The fact that the sequence begins and ends with hands together at the heart is not without purpose. Ultimately, we know truth in our heart, and the sun's centrality in the human existence can be likened to the heart's centrality in each human's personal journey. A Sun Salutation takes us through multiple different yoga poses, and the practice also includes an inhale/exhale breath pattern that corresponds with the movement from pose to pose and is another thoughtful aspect of the sequence.

Surya Namaskar was developed by the original postural yogis as a sequence that could be practiced every morning, as a warm up to the day. The sequence is practiced facing either the rising or the setting of the sun, depending on the time of day.

Do It

- Have the youth take off their shoes if they would like and position themselves toward the sun.
- Step 1: Prayer Pose
 - Keep your feet together and balance your weight equally on both feet. Expand your chest and relax your shoulders. As you breathe in, lift both arms up from the sides, and as you exhale, bring your palms together in front of the chest in a prayer position.
- Step 2: Raised Arms Pose
 - Breathing in, lift the arms up and back, keeping the biceps close to the ears. In this pose, the effort is to stretch the whole body up from the heels to the tips of the fingers.
- Step 3: Standing Forward Bend
 - Breathing out, bend forward from the waist keeping the spine erect. As you exhale completely, bring the hands down to the floor beside the feet.
- Step 4: Equestrian Pose
 - Breathing in, push your right leg back, as far back as possible. Bring the right knee to the floor and look up.
- Step 5: Stick Pose
 - As you breathe in, take the left leg back and bring the whole body in a straight line.
- Step 6: Salute with Eight Parts
 - Gently bring your knees down to the floor and exhale. Take the hips back slightly, slide forward, rest your chest and chin on the floor. Raise your posterior a little bit. The two hands, two feet, two knees, chest and chin (eight parts of the body) should touch the floor.
- Step 7: Cobra Pose
 - Slide forward and raise the chest up into the Cobra pose. You may keep your elbows bent in this pose with the shoulders away from the ears. Look up at the ceiling.
- Step 8: Downward Facing Dog
 - Breathing out, lift the hips and the tailbone up to bring the body into an inverted “V” pose.
- Step 9: Equestrian Pose
 - Breathing in, bring the right foot forward in between the two hands. The left knee goes down on the floor. Press the hips down and look up.
- Step 10: Standing Forward Bend
 - Breathing out, bring the left foot forward. Keep the palms on the floor. You may bend the knees, if necessary.
- Step 11: Raised Arms Pose
 - Breathing in, roll the spine up. Raise the hands up and bend backward a little bit, pushing the hips slightly outward.
- Step 12: Mountain Pose
 - As you exhale, first straighten the body, then bring the arms down. Relax in this position and observe the sensations in your body.
- This completes one set of Surya Namaskar. Complete the round by repeating the steps.
 - Optional: Allow different students to lead each Sun Salutation.

Discuss It

- The Sun Salutation was created to greet the sun. Are you familiar with any other sun rituals?
- Why do you think so many cultures include an appreciation for the sun?
- What other Winter Solstice traditions are you familiar with?
- In the modern day, do you think it is important to still mark the Solstices? Why?

Discuss It

Storytelling & Personal Sharing



Reflection & Discussion Prompts

Leader Note: We suggest that you read through these questions and pick 2-3 questions that will best engage your group.

Suggested Script

Just like with the dim light returning with the Winter Solstice and Scrooge's transformation in *A Christmas Carol*, hope often starts small and hidden. But once we notice it and nurture it, it begins to grow brighter. More than that, as Unitarian Universalists, we want to embrace our shared **Value of Generosity** and share our hope with one another, like we sing in one of our beloved hymns, "Come, Sing a Song with Me":
"And I'll bring you hope when hope is hard to find, and I'll bring a song of love and a rose in the wintertime."

(Consider [playing](#) or singing the song "Come, Sing a Song with Me" as a closing moment for your class. Instructor note: Carolyn McDade who wrote this hymn was one of our highlighted September UU Ancestors, as she was one of the creators of the original Water Communion Ceremony.)

Now, let's make a personal connection with today's topic and one another by sharing our own stories and thoughts around unexpected places for hope.

- When have you seen someone lift up others just by being cheerful?
- What are some unexpected places where we might find hope today?
- The Winter Solstice is both the longest night of the year and what marks the return of the sun. Why are both darkness and light important?
- Fred never gave up on his Uncle Scrooge. Why does persistence matter in being kind?
- At the end of *A Christmas Carol*, Tiny Tim says, "God bless us, everyone." Why is it important to recognize *all people* with our hopes? How does this tie into Unitarian Universalism?

Take It into The World

Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives



Check Out: Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives

We suggest ending the lesson with this "choose-your-question" checkout. Invite each youth to choose one of the 3 questions below as a way of articulating what they got out of the lesson today and how they might bring that learning/gift/insight/challenge into their everyday lives.

Questions

- What is one thing that *surprised* you about today's lesson?
- How did today's lesson *challenge* you?
- What learning or *insight* from today's lesson do you want to carry with you into days and weeks to come?

Session Four:

Hope and Choosing to Begin Again

Theme Angle

This month, we are exploring some of the different ways we can choose hope. This week, we lift up how we choose hope when we notice we can start over and write a new story for ourselves. This session gives us the opportunity to explore and honor the invitation of the new, as well as celebrate our **UU Value of Transformation**.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

Leader Note: Invite youth to volunteer to read and light the chalice each week.

A Wild and Holy Vision, By Shawn Gibson (from [Worship Web](#))

We light our chalice in the spirit of Transformation.
Nothing stays the same.
Everything moving. Shifting. Changing.
Guide us all to a Wild and Holy vision of our shared humanity.

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



New Year Transformation

Suggested Introductory Words

As one year ends and another begins, many people take time to reflect on their lives. Across cultures, people think about what they have learned that year, what they are grateful for, and what they would like to be different in the coming year. The New Year highlights our shared **Value of Transformation** and invites us to think about what transformations we would like to see or experience. Much like Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* goes through a transformation in seeing his past, present, and future and then choosing to live differently, we can explore how we would like to change, grow, and begin again.

Question: When you think about the New Year, what kind of change or transformation would you like to see for yourself or for the world at large?

(Pause and allow time for the youth to answer.)

Explore It

Creative Activities, Fun Games, and Spiritual Practice for Experiential Learning



Here are a variety of suggestions for digging deeper into the theme. We suggest that you pick 1 or 2 of these activities that you feel best suit the needs and interests of your group.

Creative Activities

Erase and Rewrite (10-15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Have a white board and dry erase marker for each youth or paper and a writing utensil.

Set It Up

The New Year is when people often think about fresh starts. Everyone makes mistakes or has times when things don't go the way they hoped. But each new day and New Year allows us to begin again. We can't change what has happened in our past, but we can change what we do next. This activity will help us think about how we can *erase* what is behind us and *rewrite* what is yet to come with a sense of hope.

Do It

- Give each youth a white board or piece of paper and something to write with.
- Invite them to think about a mistake, regret, or disappointment from the last year.
 - Ex: Losing a basketball game by missing a final shot.
 - Ex: Getting into an argument with a friend that affected their relationship.
- Ask them to write or draw a few words or symbols that represent this moment in their lives.
- Tell them that this moment doesn't need to define their story and that they get to decide what happens next.
- Have them erase or cross out what they wrote or drew.
- Have them write or draw a new version or hope for that moment going forward.
 - Ex: Instead of focusing on missing a final shot, they can practice harder this year to get better at their shots. Or, they could realize that even professional basketballers miss shots in each game.
 - Ex: They can start speaking with more kindness to their friends. Or they can invite their friend to do an activity they both enjoy.
- Ask if anyone would like to share what they wrote or drew.

Stained Glass Hope Jars (20-25 minutes) (Adapted from [First Palette](#)) (This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Easy Version: If the prep list below for this activity feels daunting, youth may decorate jars using regular permanent markers.

Advanced Version: Gather glass or plastic jars for each youth, glass paint outliner or simulated liquid leading*, transparent glass paint or glass stain*, paintbrushes, washable markers or dry erase makers, and cotton swabs. Make sure the jars are washed and dried thoroughly without any labels. Optional: Gather a blow-dryer.

Consider having a speaker or other means to stream the Soul Matters **Choosing Hope** playlist from either [Spotify](#) or [YouTube](#) while the youth are working. Or put on seasonal music.

*Alternatives:

Store bought	Homemade
glass paint outliner or simulated liquid leading	2 parts white glue + 1 part acrylic paint in a squeeze bottle
transparent glass paint or glass stain	white glue/clear liquid glue + food coloring + liquid dish soap 1-2 drops of dish soap and food coloring each per 1 tsp of glue Note: This jar should avoid being washed after using the homemade version.

Set It Up

Today we are going to create some jars for the New Year. They may be used as a tealight holder (if glass), a mini vase, or as a Hope Jar for our Spiritual Practice activity in this packet.



Do It

- Have youth sketch their designs on the jar using a washable marker or white board marker.
- Apply the glass paint outliner on the drawn lines.
- Let the lines dry.
 - Either go on to another activity in this packet and then come back to this activity. Or you may speed up the process with a blow-dryer, being careful not to smudge the outlines.
- Once the glass paint outliner lines are completely dry, using a cotton swab, erase any visible white board marker or washable marker lines made on the jar.
- Apply the glass paint inside the outlines.
 - If you made the homemade recipe, you may notice that the paint recedes or bubbles may appear on some areas. Simply paint over the bubbles.
- Let the jar dry completely.

Games

Transformation Chairs (10 minutes)

This game works best with 5+ players.

Prep It

Have a means of playing music and set up chairs in a circle facing outward, enough for one for each player (minus one).

Set It Up

We are going to play a version of Musical Chairs but with a twist. Instead of the regular rules, we are going to transform our rules each time. This game will remind us that transformation doesn't have to be scary. Change is a natural, joyful, and occasionally silly part of life.

Do It

- Start the music and have students walk around the outer perimeter of the chairs.
- When the music stops, everyone must find a seat.
- One person will be left without a chair. Instead of being "out," the rules of the game are going to change.
- That person (or anyone from the group) gets to call out a new rule that will allow everyone to fit.
 - Ex: Two people are allowed per chair.
 - Ex: You don't have to be sitting in a chair, you just have to have your elbows on it.
- Each round will still see the removal of a chair, but the group must be more creative about how everyone can use the dwindling number of chairs.
 - Ex: One person touches the chair, and they must make a human chain to touch that one person.

Freeze and Justify (10-15 minutes) (Adapted from [Child Drama](#))

This game works best with any 5+ players.

Set It Up

Every time we *freeze* and start again, we are choosing to transform what came before into something new. This helps us to practice hope and the belief that when things stop, we can reimagine the moment and begin again.

Do It

- Choose two volunteers to go first.
- These two will start to improvise a scene of either their choosing or one called out to them. It should have dialogue and as much movement as possible.
 - Ex: Two people are decorating a Christmas tree but have trouble reaching high branches.
 - Ex: Two people are going ice skating on a pond, but one of them has never skated before.
- At any moment, anyone else in the group may shout, "FREEZE!"
- The actors freeze instantly and exactly in the position they were in.
- The person who stopped the scene taps one of the actors on the shoulder. The actor sits down, and the new person takes their position exactly.
- The new person must now initiate a new and DIFFERENT scene. The scene must flow naturally from the positions of the two bodies, and it is the new person's responsibility to communicate to his or her partner and to the audience what the new scene is about.
- At any moment another person may shout, "FREEZE!" and it begins again.
 - Note: You may want to have a rule that the actor must be able to do a scene for at least 30 seconds before someone can yell "FREEZE!" so that everyone feels like they got to participate.

Two Truths and a Lie: Resolutions (10-15 minutes)

This game works with any number of players.

Prep It

Have paper and pens for everyone.

Set It Up

As we prepare for a New Year, we think about who we want to be and what we hope to try. This game helps us explore our intentions and learn a little more about one another.

Do It

- Give everyone time to think about some possible New Year's resolutions they have for the coming year.
- Then have them jot down two New Year's resolutions that are true and one that is a lie.
- Go around in a circle and have everyone share their two truths and a lie.
- Have the group guess which of the three was the lie.
 - Consider allowing time for each youth to expand on why they chose those resolutions.

Spiritual Practices

Release and Renew (10 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather dissolving paper or paper that can be torn up, plus writing utensils for the group. You will also need a bowl of water for the dissolving strips or a bowl to collect the torn pieces. Gather candles for each youth or have battery-powered tealights.

Set It Up

At the end of the year, we reflect on what we want to carry with us into the New Year and what we would like to leave behind. There are many spiritual practices that are about letting go of the things that weigh us down, such as our worries, our fears, our regrets. We are going to perform a ritual today that allows us to acknowledge those things and then make space in our hearts for hope in the New Year.

Do It

- Have the youth think about something that has weighed on them from the past year.
- Have them write down what this was or draw a symbol of it on the dissolving paper.
- When each person is ready, they may put their dissolving paper into the bowl or water (or tear up their slip and place it into the bowl.)
- Then they may light a candle from your chalice or turn on a tealight for a hope for the New Year moving forward.
 - If you are doing the Hope Jar Spiritual Practice, they could also write this hope down and put it in their jar.

Discuss It

- How did it feel to let go of something weighing you down?
- How do you normally address your worries or regrets?
- Is there a new way you might like to approach them in the coming year?
- Why is it important to make space for new hopes in the New Year?

Hope Jar Rituals (15-25 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather the stained-glass Hope Jars made by the class (from the Creative Activities section above) or new jars for each student. You may substitute paper bags if you would rather. In that case, make time for them to decorate their paper bags. This activity can be sent home for the whole family. Have at least 12 slips of paper per person cut and writing utensils for everyone.

Set It Up

It is a common practice at this time of year to make resolutions for the year to come or to think about what you would like to have as a goal. But sometimes we don't exactly know what we would like to have as a purpose or goal. Sometimes it has to reveal itself to us. At the start of January, many people celebrate a time known as Epiphany, which begins twelve days after Christmas. It is a season that celebrates discovery and revelation. We are going to fill jars for you to use during the time leading up to Epiphany, or whenever you may choose, to narrow down what your 2026 focus will be.

Do It

- Have the youth think about what their goals may be for 2026. They can be large or small goals, exact or vague.
 - Ex: I would like to be nicer to my sister.
 - Ex: I would like to reach level 120 on my new video game.
 - Ex: I would like to read a book a month.
 - Ex: I want to try out for the school musical.
 - Ex: I want to notice something I am grateful for every day.
- Have them write down on 12 slips of paper, one per slip a hope or resolution for 2026.
- Fold each resolution and place it in the jar.
- Instruct that once per day, they should select a slip and **without reading it**, they will destroy the slip (by tearing it up, throwing it away, or safely with adult supervision putting it in a fire).
- On the last day, when there is only one slip remaining, they should remove that one strip and read their new goal for 2026.
 - Optional: Send them home with supplies for the whole family to do this activity together as a ritual every day.

Discuss It

Storytelling & Personal Sharing



Reflection & Discussion Prompts

Leader Note: We suggest that you read through these questions and pick 2-3 questions that will best engage your group.

Set It Up

Show [this video](#) from The History Channel about the history of New Year's and different traditions from around the world (less than 3m).

Suggested Script

Every day offers a chance to begin again, but there is something momentous about the start of a New Year and the hope it brings. Hope doesn't mean pretending everything is perfect; it means believing change is possible. And, like the seasons continually change, our own stories are constantly unfolding. Each time we start over or face a new day, we face the opportunity for transformation.

- Since the start of this class and our opening question, is there anything else you have thought you want to see in your story for 2026?
- Why do so many people and cultures have New Year traditions? How does that tie to hope?
- In the video, we saw that the New Year has been at different months of the year across time and cultures. When do you think makes the best sense and why?
- How does your family mark the New Year?
- When is a time when you were offered a fresh start?

Take It into The World

Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives



Check Out: Carrying the Gifts of Today into Our Lives

We suggest ending the lesson with this "choose-your-question" checkout. Invite each youth to choose one of the 3 questions below as a way of articulating what they got out of the lesson today and how they might bring that learning/gift/insight/challenge into their everyday lives. These questions are the same for every session, so we suggest making a poster to hang in your youth space, so it becomes part of your closing ritual.

Questions

- What is one thing that *surprised* you about today's lesson?
- How did today's lesson *challenge* you?
- What learning or *insight* from today's lesson do you want to carry with you into days and weeks to come?

Movie Night Ideas

Community Building and Bonding



A youth movie event is a great way to encourage young teens to bond as a community, have fun at church, and dive a bit more into the monthly theme. You could also consider making this an all-ages event. Here are a few tips for how to make your movie night a success.

1. Offer dinner and/or snacks (*be sure to check in about allergies/food needs first)
 - Popcorn or chips are movie event staples, but out-of-the-box options are even more fun.
 - If you decide on a specific theme, it's easy choosing foods to fit your specific topic.
 - For more customized options, consider setting up a candy bar or DIY trail mix bar.
 - Make it a potluck and have everyone bring their own favorite treats to share.
2. Combine it with a lock-in: An evening full of games, tons of pizza, and hanging out with friends is exactly the type of thing teens love. Make an impact on their night by showing a movie that shares the message of the month. Showing the film early in the evening before everyone gets tired gives them something to talk about into the wee hours.
3. Connect it back to the theme: Once your movie is over, invite youth into a follow-up group that ties it back to the theme of the month.

Movie Suggestions for December's *Choosing Hope*:

A Muppet Christmas Carol (1992)

Note: There are various versions of *A Christmas Carol*. Choose your favorite.

"The Muppets perform the classic Dickens holiday tale, with Kermit the Frog playing Bob Cratchit, the put-upon clerk of stingy Ebenezer Scrooge (Michael Caine). Other Muppets -- Miss Piggy, Gonzo, Fozzie Bear and Sam the Eagle -- weave in and out of the story. They show Scrooge the error of his self-serving ways, but the miserable old man seems to be past any hope of redemption and happiness." –[Source](#)

Theme connection: Hope, Transformation, Unexpected Places, forgiveness

The Polar Express (2004)

"When a doubting young boy takes a train ride to the North Pole, he embarks on a journey of self-discovery that shows him that the wonder of life never fades for those who believe." –[Source](#)

Theme connection: Trusting things will work out, hope in unexpected places, wonder

Klaus (2019)

"A selfish postman and a reclusive toymaker form an unlikely friendship, delivering joy to a cold, dark town that desperately needs it." –[Source](#)

Theme Connection: Creative light for others, generosity, hope in dark times

The Little Prince (2015)

"The Aviator introduces a girl to a world where she rediscovers her childhood and learns that it's human connections that matter most, and that it is only with heart that one can see rightly" –[Source](#)

Theme Connection: Hope, light in the darkness, compassion

Other Intergenerational/All-ages Activities in this Packet:

From Session 2

- Oil That Lasts Jars
- Dreidel

From Session 4

- Stained Glass Hope Jars
- Release and Renew
- Hope Jar Rituals

Other Resources and Sources of Support

RE Leader Facebook Page

Don't forget about our RE Leader Support Facebook page. Here is where our colleagues post bulletin board pictures and share books and ideas. It's a great ongoing source of support. Your colleagues are available to support you at the click of a button and with the ease of a post: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/545202255591601/>

Inspiration Facebook Page

Offer your teachers and parents spiritual nourishment and inspiration by encouraging them to join the Soul Matters Inspiration Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

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Thanks to all the Soul Matters Religious Educators who send in suggestions for our monthly packets and participate in our monthly packet brainstorming calls.

Thanks also to the other [Soul Matters Team](#) members who contribute to the content and shape of these packets.



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