



Soul Matters

Paying Attention



In the Middle
March 2026

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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 The Power of Attention!

Welcome to the March “In the Middle” *Soul Matters* Packet for middle school youth on **The Power of Attention**.

March often feels like a month of in-between. The old saying is “In like a lion, out like a lamb,” but where I live in New England, it often feels like “In like a lion, out like a lion.” Winter hasn’t quite let go, spring hasn’t fully arrived, and I find my attention pulled by the warm weather and spring blossoms I hope are right around the corner. Even as the days grow longer, it can be hard to notice the subtle shifts happening around us and within us.

This month’s packet invites us to slow down just enough to notice those shifts. What we pay attention to—our impact on others, injustice in the world, the present moment, the natural world, and our own inner wisdom—has real consequences, whether we are aware of them or not.

Across five sessions, youth will explore how attention is not just about focus, but about intention. Together, we’ll ask questions about how our choices affect others, what happens when we notice inequality instead of looking away, how paying attention to the present moment can help us feel steadier and calmer, how our relationship with water reflects our relationship with the earth, and how listening inward can guide us when decisions feel complicated.

Session One: Paying Attention to Our Impact on Others

Session Two: Paying Attention to Inequality

Session Three: Paying Attention to the Present Moment

Session Four: Paying Attention to Our Relationship with Water

Session Five: Paying Attention to the Wisdom Within

Our Unitarian Universalist values call us to live with intention, to seek justice, and to care for the earth. This month, youth will draw on these values as they explore practices from Buddhism, learn from contemporary UU and Zen thinker Rev. James Ishmael Ford, and reflect on how attention connects inner awareness with ethical action in the world.

Because attention is something we practice with our whole bodies, this packet balances reflection and discussion with movement and games and calls on recognizing our five senses. One of my favorite activities this month is a “Glacier Ice Relay,” when the youth will need to carry (perhaps) melting ice with chopsticks. Another favorite activity asks them to pay attention to the impact gendered toy marketing may have on children, and a similar one asks them to examine a picture of the current U.S. Senate to see who is in the room making decisions and who is noticeably absent. One more favorite activity is the immensely helpful 5-4-3-2-1 anxiety coping technique harnessed as a spiritual practice this month.

With all of these activities, may this month help us all notice what truly matters.

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

Session One:

The Power of Paying Attention to Our Impact on Others

Theme Angle

All month long, we are exploring how powerful attention is. This week, we are focusing on **The Power of Paying Attention to Our Impact on Others**. To do that, we will let World Compliment Day Guide us. As we all know, compliments have the power to brighten people's day, which is a great reminder of how the impact of our attitudes, choices, and mood can shape the attitudes, choices, and moods of others. This will help us get at the importance of being intentional about how we are in the world, because for better or worse, our “stuff” spills over into the lives of others.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

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

From *The Little White Bird* by J.M. Barrie

“Shall we make a new rule of life from tonight: always to try to be a little kinder than is necessary?”

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



A Change for the Better

Suggested Introductory Words

(Consider watching a portion of [this YouTube video](#) of people's faces before and after being told they are beautiful. [4m30])

Often, we move through our days without really noticing the effect we have on the people around us. A comment we make without much thought can linger. It can sometimes lift someone up or it can weigh on them longer than we ever realize. Paying attention to our impact on others means noticing that our words, tone, and presence don't stop with us. They can travel with others long after we have walked away.

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

Has someone ever said something to you that has changed your whole day for the better? What was it?

(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

Invisible Backpack (10-15 minutes)

This can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather markers or crayons and print these [backpack coloring sheets](#) for the youth.

Set It Up

All of us move through the world carrying things other people can't see, things like our worries, our strengths, or our experiences. Other things have to do with the situations we're born into or the environments we grow up in. None of these are visible just by looking at someone, but what they are carrying can affect their reactions to what we say to them. We can't always tell what someone else is dealing with, but by paying attention and thinking about what others might be carrying, we can begin to treat people with more care and understanding.

Do It

- Have the youth doodle or write on their backpacks what others might be carrying with them throughout their day.
- Have them think about what feelings that might be, relationships, family roles and duties, activities, worries, hopes, strengths, pressures.
- At the end, have anyone who wants to share their backpack with the group.

Discuss It

- How can paying attention make us less likely to hurt someone accidentally?
- What are other things we can't tell about someone just by looking at them?
- Have you ever made a poor assumption about someone else?
- Has anyone ever made a poor assumption about you based on your appearance?
- How might remembering that others are carrying unseen things change how we talk to them?

Compliment Post Office (15-20 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather card making supplies: cardstock, stickers, markers, envelopes, pens, etc.

Set It Up

World Compliment Day is celebrated on March 1, and the idea behind it is simple but powerful. It is to remind people that sincere, thoughtful words can make a real difference. A compliment doesn't have to be big or dramatic; it just has to be genuine.

When we take a moment to notice something kind, brave, or meaningful about another person and actually say it out loud or write it down, we're paying attention to our impact on the people around us. Today, we're going to practice that kind of noticing and care by sending compliments to one another.

Do It

- Have each youth brainstorm who in their lives could use a compliment right now. They can think about their church community, their family members, their friends, their classmates, their teachers, their community members, etc.
- Have them write these compliments on cards, focusing on what is specific and truthful.
- Have them deliver their compliment cards after your session, and they can be signed or anonymous.

Discuss It

- Is it easier for you to give compliments or receive them? Why do you think that is?
- What makes a compliment feel genuine instead of awkward or fake?
- Why do you think people sometimes notice positive things about others but don't say them out loud?
- Have you ever complimented a stranger?
- What is your favorite compliment to get?

Games

Attention Tag (10 minutes)

This activity works best with 4+ youth.

Set It Up

We're going to play a game that looks like regular tag, but it's really about attention and who we notice, who we overlook, and how small actions can change someone else's experience. In everyday life, we're constantly sending signals to one another: eye contact, smiles, tone of voice, body language. We often don't realize how much those signals affect the people around us. This game helps us practice paying attention on purpose and noticing how it feels to be seen or not seen by others.

Do It

- Choose one player to be "It."
- Everyone else spreads out in the space.
- If tagged, you must freeze in place and put up a hand to show you are frozen.
- Another player can unfreeze you by saying your name and "I see you." Ex: "Jason, I see you."
- You cannot unfreeze the same person twice in a row. You have to notice someone new each time.
- Every few minutes rotate who is "It."

Eye Contact (10 minutes) (Taken from [ResLife](#))

This activity works best with 6+ youth.

Set It Up

I want you to think about how often eye contact happens without us planning it. Sometimes it makes us feel connected. Sometimes it feels awkward or uncomfortable. Sometimes it feels powerful or challenging. Eye contact is one of the simplest ways humans notice one another, and it is also one of the easiest to avoid. This game is about what happens when attention goes both ways. You'll be making a choice about who to look at, and at the same time, someone else is making a choice about where to place their attention. Sometimes those choices line up. Sometimes they don't.

Do It

- Standing in a circle, have everyone look down.
- On a certain cue, have everyone look up at a specific person not directly to his or her left or right.
- If you make eye contact with someone, you must take a step back from the circle.
- If you do not make eye contact with the person, you are still in the game.
- When you get down to the last three or four people, you can look at whoever you want to. You are no longer limited by the previous rule about the person standing right next to you.
- When you get down to your last two people, everyone else can come back in and play starts over.

Discuss It

- Were you ever able to predict where someone was going to look?
- Did your strategy change as the group got smaller?
- Does eye contact ever feel awkward to you?
- Do you think you can feel when someone is looking at you?
- When is eye contact important?

Blind Drawing Partners (10-15 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Have paper and pens or white boards and markers.

Set It Up

This game is about what happens when we have to rely completely on someone else's attention and instructions and when someone else is relying on us. In everyday life, we give directions, explain ideas, and tell stories all the time. Whether the other person understands doesn't just depend on how carefully they listen, but also on how clearly and thoughtfully we speak. In this activity, one person will describe an image using only words, and the other person will try to draw it. The goal isn't to make a perfect picture. The goal is to notice how attention, clarity, and patience affect the outcome.

Do It

- The Drawer gets a blank piece of paper and a pencil or a white board and marker.
- The Describer either thinks of a simple image (a house, a tree, etc.) or you may provide them with slips.
- The Describer must explain the image using only generic words. They may use shape names, size comparisons, position words (above, below, inside, parallel, etc.), and order.
 - Ex: There is a large square on top of it is a triangle, and its bottom is the same width as the square. Or there is a tall skinny rectangle. On top of the rectangle is a big circle.
- No pointing or hand motions are allowed. They may also not say specific directions like, "Now put a door in the middle." Or "Draw a flower."
- Both the Drawer and any Guessers may guess what the image is.
- Once an image is guessed correctly, switch roles and draw a new image.

Spiritual Practice

Loving Attention (10 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Set It Up

Today we're going to try a practice called Loving Attention. We use our attention all day every day, but this allows us to use it in a focused, caring way. In Unitarian Universalism, and in many spiritual traditions, we believe the way we pay attention can actually shape the world.

When we notice someone with kindness, or when we hold someone in our thoughts with care, we are practicing something spiritual. We are choosing to focus our energy not just on ourselves or what's happening right now, but on the wellbeing of another person. That simple act of giving attention with care can be powerful. Spiritual practices don't always have to involve long rituals or fancy words. They can be as simple as breathing, noticing, and sending good thoughts.

Do It

Read the following script or phrase it in your own words.

- Find a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes, or if you prefer, soften your gaze and look gently downward.
- Take a slow breath in and out. Notice how your body feels right now.
- Think of someone who helped you recently. It could be a friend, a family member, a teacher, or anyone who did something that made your day a little easier or happier.
- Picture them in your mind. Notice how it feels to remember what they did. Pay attention to the warmth, the gratitude, or even the smile that comes to your face. Let yourself feel appreciation for them.
- Now, shift your attention to someone who might need some kindness or support tomorrow. Maybe it's someone who is having a hard day, someone who's struggling, or someone who could use a friendly word.
- Imagine sending them good thoughts, care, or encouragement. Picture them feeling a little lighter or happier because of your attention. Notice how it feels to wish someone well, even from afar.
- Take one more slow, deep breath in and out.
- And now, silently or softly, repeat to yourself: "May the attention we give be loving."
- When you're ready, open your eyes or lift your gaze.

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

This week, we've spent time noticing how powerful our attention can be when it is on ourselves, on others, and on the world around us. We practiced seeing and being seen, listening carefully, noticing kindness, and paying attention to details we might normally overlook. We also used our attention to send compliments into the world.

- How might a group or community change if people practiced giving thoughtful compliments more often?
- Is there a difference between complimenting someone's abilities, their choices, or how they treat others? Which do you think lasts the longest?
- What do you personally gain by giving compliments?
- What's the difference between being nice and being attentive?
- How does being kinder and more attentive to others make you kinder to yourself?

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:

The Power of Paying Attention to Inequality

Theme Angle

All month long, we are exploring how powerful attention is. This week, we are focusing on The Power of Paying Attention to Inequality. To do that, we will let International Women's Day guide us as well as the fact that women have drawn our attention to inequalities of all kinds in society.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

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

As we light our chalice today, let us hold the wisdom of journalist Elaine Welteroth: “When the world tells you to shrink, expand.” Let us always expand the idea of what we are capable of together.

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



Two Different Aisles

Suggested Introductory Words

(Print [this image](#) of gendered toy aisles or have it available for your youth digitally.)



Women have always been on the forefront of fighting for equality, whether standing up for abolition or their own right to vote. The first International Women's Day was celebrated in 1911, and it received UN recognition in 1975. Even decades later, the fight for gender equality is far from over, and it isn't just about pay checks, board rooms, and sports facilities. Issues with gender access can start in childhood. Take a look at these two toy aisles, one labeled for girls and one for boys.

What does this type of marketing express to children of any gender identity?

(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

Inequality Stations (20 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Print [this sheet](#) and cut it into three strips, setting each strip in a different part of the room.

Set It Up

For this activity, we're going to practice paying attention to situations where people don't all experience the world in the same way. Sometimes inequality isn't obvious at first glance, but it shows up in patterns, numbers, and everyday experiences that we don't always stop to notice.

Around the room are three different stations. Each one highlights a situation where opportunities, resources, or visibility are not shared equally. Each will invite you to notice what's happening and think about how attention or lack of attention shapes these outcomes.

Do It

- Break the students into groups that will rotate through the three stations.
- Each group will have an allotted amount of time at each station to read the statistic aloud and then discuss the questions and their creative solutions.
- When the timer goes, rotate groups to a new station. The groups do not have to get through all of the questions. They can pick and choose which ones they like and get through as much conversation as the time will allow.
 - Alternative: If you have a very small group, you can discuss everything as a group.
- The three situation strips in the printable are:
 - Statistic: According to UNICEF, around 40 percent of girls worldwide do not complete secondary school.
 - Ask:
 - What might make it harder for someone your age to stay in school?
 - Why might it be harder for girls to stay in school vs. girls?
 - What could eliminate this gap?
 - How does noticing unequal access to education help us think about fairness?

- Statistic: According to Worldmetrics, even though women’s sports generate significant revenue, only about 2 percent of sports media coverage goes to women’s sports.
 - Ask:
 - Why do you think this is true?
 - What message does this send to girls?
 - Why is it important to see yourself represented?
 - How could this change?
- Statistic: According to Red Yellow Blue, in the United States, women earned about 83 cents for every dollar earned by men.
 - Ask:
 - What might cause two people doing the same job to be paid differently?
 - How does being aware of this change how we think about fairness at work or in society?
 - Should there be legal interventions to prevent this?
- When all groups have rotated through the stations, bring them all back together and ask if anyone would like to share their reflections, going through each statistic.

Visibility Posters (15-20 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This activity can be done with any number of youth

Prep It

Have on hand poster board or large sheets of paper, rulers, pencils, and markers.

Set It Up

We are going to think about visibility and who gets noticed, heard, and remembered, and who often doesn’t. Visibility isn’t just about being seen; it’s about whose stories, experiences, and contributions get attention in the first place. Sometimes people or groups aren’t invisible because they’re not doing important things; they’re invisible because we haven’t been taught to pay attention to them. This activity is about practicing a different kind of attention: choosing to notice, name, and lift up people or ideas that don’t always get the spotlight.

Do It

- Give each youth poster-making supplies or let them partner up.
- Encourage them to think about an issue they think is in need of more attention. Have them think about why this issue is important and what it is worthy of lifting up. What would be interesting for others to know?
- Then have them make a poster to draw the attention of others to this issue.
 - Students can use the statistics from the Inequality Stations as a jumping off point, they can think about issues personal to them, or you can give them ideas.
- When everyone is done with the posters, ask anyone who wants to share with the group.

Games

Privilege Line (10 minutes) *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

This game works with any number of players.

Set It Up

This activity asks us to pay attention to how people can experience the world differently, even when they're standing in the same room. Often, we assume that everyone's life looks roughly the same from the outside. This activity invites us to slow down and notice that it usually isn't.

Do It

- Have the students stand in a line or in a circle, then read the following:
- Take one step forward if you often see people like you as heroes or leaders in movies or books.
- Take one step back if you rarely see people like you represented positively in the media.
- Take one step forward if teachers usually pronounce your name correctly.
- Take one step back if people often make assumptions about you based on how you look
- Take one step forward if you feel comfortable speaking up in class.
- Take one step back if you've ever stayed quiet because you didn't think your voice would matter.
- Take one step forward if adults usually take your concerns seriously.
- Take one step back if you've felt talked over or ignored in group settings.
- Take one step forward if you usually feel like you belong at school or in groups.
- Take one step back if you've ever felt like an outsider in a place you were supposed to belong.
- Take one step forward if you don't worry much about being teased for who you are.
- Take one step back if you've changed something about yourself to fit in or stay safe.
- Take one step forward if you have at least one adult who strongly advocates for you.
- Take one step back if you often have to figure things out on your own.
- Take one step forward if you're encouraged to try leadership roles.
- Take one step back if people assume you wouldn't be good at certain things.
- Take one step forward if rules usually seem fair to you.
- Take one step back if rules seem to affect some people more harshly than others.
- Take one step forward if you're usually given the benefit of the doubt.
- Take one step back if you feel you have to prove yourself more than others.

Discuss It

- Did anything surprise you with these prompts?
- Did any patterns stand out?
- How might these patterns affect people over time?
- What does this have to do with paying attention?

Psychiatrist (10-15 minutes) (Taken from [Dig the Games](#))

This game works best with 5+ youth.

Set It Up

This game explores what it feels like when everyone seems to be playing with information or rules that you don't have or when you start with a disadvantage.

Do It

- Arrange all of the youth in a circle except for the one chosen to be the Psychiatrist.
- Send the Psychiatrist out of the room.
- While they're gone, the group agrees on a funny or quirky "condition" to act out.
 - Ex: Everyone acts like the person to their right, every answer must begin with the letter "B," or everyone believes they are an Avenger, etc.
- Bring back the Psychiatrist.
- The Psychiatrist asks questions to the group to try to figure out the condition. They cannot ask the same person twice in a row.
- Players must always answer according to the agreed condition.
- The Psychiatrist keeps asking until they correctly guess the group's rule condition.
- Once solved, pick a new Psychiatrist and play again with a new condition.

Guess the Leader (10 minutes) (Taken from [Great Camp Games](#))

This game works best with any number of youth.

Set It Up

This next game is all about paying close attention to a group without knowing exactly what you're looking for. It's a reminder that leadership and influence don't always announce themselves. They often show up in subtle ways.

Do It

- Have participants sit cross-legged in a circle.
- Choose someone to be the Detective and have them go where they can't see the group.
- Choose someone in the group to be the Leader and make sure everyone in the circle knows who it is.
- Have the Leader start a motion such as hand-clapping, thigh-slapping, or foot-tapping.
- Everyone else in the group must try to copy what the Leader is doing as accurately as possible.
- Call the Detective back in to stand in the middle of the circle.
- The Leader will change the motion every so often when the Detective isn't looking, and all the other players must change their actions to mirror the Leader.
- The Detective has three chances to guess the identity of the Leader.
- You can have the Leader be the Detective in the next round.

Spiritual Practice

Paying Attention to our Democratic Process (10 minutes)

This activity works with any number of youth.

Prep It

Print a color copy of [this image](#) of the 119th U.S. Senate for every youth.

Set It Up

As Unitarian Universalists, we value the democratic process and the examined life. That means we don't just care that decisions are made; we care who is making them, whose voices are present, and whose are missing. Sometimes our spiritual practices are more akin to prayer or meditation. Sometimes they are a ritual that focuses us. Today's spiritual practice involves our attention in a very intentional way. We're going to look at a photograph of the current United States Senate. This group of people makes laws and decisions that affect millions of lives, including yours. Often, we talk about democracy in abstract ways. This practice asks us to slow down and really look.

This is a spiritual practice because it asks us to notice reality as it is, to reflect on representation and power, and to listen.

Do It

- Look at this photo of the current U.S. Senate.
- For the first minute or two, we'll just look silently. Let your eyes move around the image.
- Notice who you see and any patterns that stand out. See if there are any surprises.
- Think about who is missing from this image. Do you see someone like you in this image? Someone like your family?
- Think about age, gender, race, and other visible traits. Also, think about what traits aren't possible to see in a photo.
- Think about who might feel represented by this group and who might not. What questions might this group raise?
- After a couple of minutes, invite the youth to share their observations, if need be, repeating the questions above.

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

This week, we practiced paying attention to differences in how people experience the world. We noticed patterns, asked questions, and looked carefully at who is included, who is missing, and who has a voice in making decisions that affect all of us.

- Why do you think some inequalities are easier to notice than others?
- What happens when people don't pay attention to who is included or excluded?
- Why do you think it matters who gets to be visible, heard, or listened to?
- How does paying attention to inequality connect to our UU values, especially Justice and Equity?
- What do you want adults, leaders, or communities to pay more attention to?

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:

The Power of Paying Attention to the Present Moment

Theme Angle

All month long, we are exploring how powerful attention is. This week, we are focusing on The Power of Paying Attention to the Present Moment. As we do that, we will have the chance to explore some of the ways we can recenter ourselves in a world full of distractions that can knock us off balance. This session also gives us a chance to celebrate the wisdom of Buddhism and celebrate the inspiring Zen priest and UU minister Rev. James Ishmael Ford.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

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

As we light our chalice, let us heed the call from Zen priest and UU minister Rev. James Ishael Ford that “We can learn to use the fire of our minds to good purpose.”

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



The Zen of Silence

Suggested Introductory Words

(Consider watching a portion of this video of [Zen in Five Minutes](#) from Rev. James Ishmael Ford.)

Rev. James Ishmael Ford is both a Zen priest and a UU minister. He wrote in [UU World](#), “I have a formal practice that invites the silence. Over the years, finding regular times to just sit with it has been critical.... Silence tells me where I come from. It points to where I will go. And it runs a wild current through my life today. Silence informs my understanding of how all of us rise and fall within rhythms at once subtle and larger than my imaginings. It shows me how I am connected to the rest of my human family and to the larger family of things.”

Question: When is silence important to you?

(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

Attention Mapping (10-15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather paper and drawing supplies.

Set It Up

One of the core ideas in Buddhism is that where our attention goes, our life follows. Today's activity is a way to slow down and notice where your attention actually goes during a regular day. Not where you wish it went, or where you think it should go, but where it really goes.

This practice calls for both honesty and awareness. In Buddhism, simply noticing without judgment is the first step toward wisdom. When we pay attention to where our energy goes, we begin to understand ourselves better, and that helps us make more thoughtful choices.

Do It

- Have the youth draw a large circle in the center of your paper.
- Divide the circle into sections, representing different parts of their day or life.
 - Examples might include school, friends, family, screens / social media, hobbies, worries, daydreaming, body needs, exercise, chores, after-school job, etc.
- Color and label the sections based on how much attention each one gets during a typical day.
 - Bigger or darker sections mean more attention.
- Invite anyone who wants to share to do so.

Discuss It

- Were there any surprises in your attention map?
- What were the tasks or sections that collectively got the most attention?
- Is there anything that you think should take up more space on your map?
- How might paying attention to how you spend your time change your day?
- In Buddhism there is a wisdom that noticing/awareness must come before change. Why do you think this is?

Five Sense Cards (15+ minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth. *(This can be used as an intergenerational activity.)*

Prep It

Collage version: Gather large index cards or cut cardstock, magazines, scissors, and glue sticks.

Drawing version: Gather large index cards or cut cardstock and drawing supplies.

Set It Up

In Buddhist mindfulness practice, one of the most common ways to return to the present moment is through the five senses. The senses are always happening right now. When we pay attention to them, it brings us to the present moment. When Rev. James Ishmael Ford [wrote](#) about integrating the Zen practice of paying attention to your senses with Unitarian Universalism, he advised, “Engage it all with a spirit of invitation, and maybe you’ll begin to notice gratitude welling up from somewhere deep within.”

Today you’re going to create your own Five Sense Cards. What you choose to put on your card reflects what helps you notice the present moment.

Do It

- Review the five senses: Touch, Taste, Sight, Smell, Sound.
- Have each youth pick a sense to start. *(The time allotment of this activity can vary based on how many cards the students make.)*
- Have them cut out images and words from the magazines that call to that sense and then glue them on.
 - Drawing version: Have them draw images or write words that call to that sense.
- Instruct them that they can then keep these cards as a visual reminder to ground themselves in one of their senses when they need to be in the present moment.

Discuss It

- Is there a sense that you feel drawn to more than the others? Why?
- Are there particular sights, sounds, smells, etc. that are meaningful to you?
- Which sense do you find is the hardest one to focus on? Why?
- How else can you use your senses when you need to be in the present moment?

Games

Psychic Ten (<10 minutes) *(Adapted from [ResLife](#))*

This activity works with any number of youth.

Set It Up

Most of the time, we communicate with words, gestures, or eye contact without even realizing we are communicating. This game takes all of that away, as there is no looking, no signaling, no planning. Instead you have to practice patience and awareness of the group as you listen.

Do It

- Have everyone sit in a circle with their backs to one another and close their eyes.
- The challenge is to see how high the group can count. *(The game is called Psychic Ten, but you can challenge your group to count to 30, 50, etc.)*
- Only one person can speak at a time.
- If more than one person speaks, they must start counting again at “one.”

Concentration (10 minutes) *(Taken from [Fun Attic Campfire Games](#))*

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Have a small ring or other object for students to hold in their hand.

Set It Up

Our attention is pulled in a lot of directions every day. This game asks us to do the opposite. It asks us to slow down and listen carefully. If you stop paying attention, even for a moment, the game falls apart.

Do It

- One player chooses a category (e.g., girls’ names, countries, sports).
- They start with an item from the category that begins with “A.”
 - Example: “Amanda” for girls’ names.
- The next player repeats the previous word(s) and adds one beginning with the next letter: “B,” then “C,” and so on.
- If a player forgets the order, repeats the wrong letter, or chooses a word outside the category, they’re out.
 - Add a Challenge: For extra difficulty, have players repeat all previous items in order before adding their word.
- When you are done with that category, have someone else select a new one.

Tray of Attention (10 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather a tray and an assortment of mixed objects: toys, natural items, art supplies, office supplies, fruit, etc.

Set It Up

This game demonstrates how paying close attention in the moment helps us notice details—and how easy it is to miss things when we're distracted.

Do It

- Have someone show the tray to the group for one minute.
- Allow them to look only, no touching. Encourage them to pay attention to as many details as possible.
- After one minute, hide the tray so no one can see the objects anymore.
- Ask a variety of questions pertaining to your tray to see what they recall.
 - Ex: "How many objects were red?" "What object was touching the banana?" "How many paper clips were there?" "What color was the pen?"
- Allow the students to answer individually or as a team.
 - Alternative: Have them write down their answers.
 - Alternative: Have a volunteer bring in the tray and then leave and then leave the room. Ask what color shirt the tray carrier was wearing.

Spiritual Practices

Coming Home to the Body in 5-4-3-2-1 (10 minutes) (Taken from [The University of Rochester Behavioral Health Partners](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Set It Up

When we feel anxious or overwhelmed, our minds often race ahead into worries about the future or loop back into things that have already happened. Once your mind starts to race like that, it can be very difficult to get on top of it and slow it back down. In Buddhism, there is a teaching that much of our suffering comes from being pulled away from the present moment. Mindfulness is one of the core practices of Buddhism, and it is about gently returning our attention to what is happening right now.

The 5-4-3-2-1 technique is a modern grounding practice, but it fits closely with this ancient idea. It helps us anchor our attention in our senses. It makes us focus on what we can see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. Buddhists sometimes describe this awareness of our senses as “coming home to the body.”

Do It

Before starting this exercise, pay attention to your breathing. Slow, deep, long breaths can help you maintain a sense of calm or help you return to a calmer state.

Once you find your breath, go through the following steps to help ground yourself:

- 5: Acknowledge FIVE things you see around you. It could be a pen, a spot on the ceiling, anything in your surroundings.
- 4: Acknowledge FOUR things you can touch around you. It could be your hair, a table, or the ground under your feet.
- 3: Acknowledge THREE things you hear. This could be any external sound. If you can hear your belly rumbling that counts! Focus on things you can hear outside of your body.
- 2: Acknowledge TWO things you can smell. Maybe you smell a freshly sharpened pencil or the lotion of someone sitting next to you.
- 1: Acknowledge ONE thing you can taste. What does the inside of your mouth taste like: gum, coffee, or the muffin from breakfast?

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

This week, we practiced something that sounds simple but is actually very powerful: paying attention to what is happening right now. We noticed how easily our attention can drift and how gently bringing it back can change how we feel in our bodies and in our minds. Each activity reminded us that attention is something we can practice, not something we either have or don't have.

- What can make paying attention difficult?
- How can focus on the present moment help us in stressful situations?
- Do you have a favorite mindfulness technique?
- What is one thing you can be more mindful about this week?
- How could paying attention to the present moment make us kinder people?

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:

The Power of Paying Attention To Our Relationship With Water

Theme Angle

All month long, we are exploring how powerful attention is. This week, we are focusing on The Power of Paying Attention to Our Relationship with Water. To do that, we will let World Water Day guide us. As we all know, next month is Earth Day, which invites us to look at many of the issues around the climate crisis, but World Water Day gives us the gift of focusing on this one aspect of nature and the earth. This will be an excellent chance for us to discover how our relationship with water is more complex and wonderful than we often realize.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

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

As we read these words from Aurora Levins Morales from *The Shalom Center's* "The Shalom Report: Water is Life! The Sacred Waters of Life Must Not be Poisoned by the Dakota Oil Pipeline," may we remember that water is the source of all.

"We are always changing: wide seas into clouds, rain into puddles, rivers into muddy fields that run along ditches into the sea. We flow, freeze, boil, rise, disperse, are hurled this way and that. We declare that we are the blue edge of glaciers, the great ocean swell, stagnant teeming ponds, months long tropical downpours, the delicate tracery of frost on a dry leaf, the rusty drip of a faucet."

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



Water is Everywhere

Suggested Introductory Words

(Consider showing [this video](#) about teen clean water activist Autumn Peltier from the Wiikwemkoong First Nation in Ontario [3m23].)

Water is everywhere. It is in our bodies, traverses our communities, and covers most of our planet. Paying attention to it helps us notice how it shapes life, how we use it, and how we can care for it. This week, we mark World Water Day, a United Nations initiative, highlighting the importance of freshwater and raising awareness for the 2.2 billion people who lack access to clean water.

So, to begin, let's ask our first question.

How can you stand up as a water activist?

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

Optional second question: **How did this video make you feel about your relationship to and access to clean water?**

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

Watercolor and Oil (15 minutes) (Taken from [Babble Dabble Do](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.



Prep It

Gather liquid watercolors, watercolor paper, eye droppers, cooking oil, trays or plates, and paint trays/containers. As this project can be messy, have paper towels on hand.

Set It Up

Today we're focusing on the power of paying attention to our relationship with water. Water is something most of us interact with every single day, often without thinking much about it. But water is not just a background detail of our lives. It is active, powerful, unpredictable, and essential.

In this activity, we're going to let water show us what it does when we really pay attention to it. You'll be using water, watercolor paint, oil, and an eyedropper. You won't have full control over what happens, and that's the point. Water moves, spreads, resists, and changes based on how we treat it. When we rush, it behaves differently than when we slow down. So let's slow down and see what this water has to show us.

Do It

- Mix your liquid watercolors and water in individual containers.
- Pour cooking oil into a separate container.
- Place your watercolor paper in a tray.
- Using an eyedropper, drop watercolors on the paper.
- Using a different eyedropper, drop oil onto the paper and watercolors.
- Repeat these steps as desired.
- Without disturbing the mix too much, move to a safe location to dry for several hours or overnight.

Just Add Water Art (15-20 minutes) (Adapted from [Fun Littles](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.



Prep It

Gather crepe paper or streamers in multiple colors, eye droppers, paint brushes, water, and watercolor paper. Have paper towels on hand to clean up. Tear up the crepe paper or streamers into tiny chunks or have the youth do that as their first step.

Set It Up

This kind of “painting” with crepe paper requires a particular attention. Once the water touches the crepe paper, the color begins to move immediately. You can’t fully control where it goes or how strong it will be. You can influence it, but only if you’re paying close attention.

As you work, notice how your actions vary how quickly the color transfers, what happens when you add more water versus less, and how the image changes when the crepe paper is removed. You don’t need to rush this. In fact, the more carefully you observe, the more interesting the result may become.

Do It

- This activity has multiple ways to do it. Present each method to the youth and then let them choose their favorite way.
 - Use a brush and paint the paper with water and then stick the colored bits.
 - Arrange the bits in groups and then use an eye dropper to drench them with water.
 - Arrange the bits in small groups and then dab them with water using a brush.
- It doesn’t take long for the color to transfer from the paper. Peel off the paper and see the color transfer below.
- Keep exploring new methods until you are pleased.

Games

Boulders in the Stream (10 minutes)

This game works best with 4+ players.

Set It Up

Imagine a stream after a lot of rain. The water is moving fast, pulling leaves and branches along with it. In the middle of that moving water are unmoving boulders, and the water has to flow around them. Sometimes it swirls, slows down, or changes direction entirely.

Today's game is called Boulders in the Stream, and it's about attention. The moving water represents everything pulling at your attention: noise, distractions, pressure, time limits, expectations. The boulders represent obstacles you can't ignore: problems, responsibilities, moments where you have to slow down and notice what's in front of you.

Do It

- Place chairs or items as Boulders scattered through the space.
- Choose one youth as the "current leader."
- Students move across the room following the Current Leader's pace and direction.
- The Current Leader must change speed and direction unpredictably.
- Players must navigate around Boulders without touching them while following the exact path and speed of the Current Leader.
- If someone touches a Boulder or misses a turn from the Current Leader, they freeze until another player gently taps them free.
- Players must pay attention to the Current Leader, the Boulders, and players who need unfreezing.
- Periodically change who is the Current Leader.

Island Hopping (10 minutes)

This game works best with any number of players.

Prep It: Have paper plates, mats, pieces of paper, or carpet squares you can spread around as islands. Have a device that plays music.

Set It Up

There are lots of different types of humor. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper focused on satire, irony, and sarcasm, but there's also observational humor, wordplay, exaggeration, deadpan, self-deprecating, warm humor, slapstick, physical comedy, and absurd humor. For this activity, we are going to focus on humor that is physical and absurd.

Do It

- Scatter "Islands" around your space.
- Have youth move around the room to music.
- When the music stops, everyone must be on an island.
- After each round, remove an Island.
- Unlike in Musical Chairs, youth can share Islands. (Encourage them to make room for their peers and see how creative they can be to get everyone on their Island.)

Discuss It

- In real life, what feels like "islands in a stream" for you? What are the places that give you refuge?
- What are some "streams" or distractions in your daily life that pull your attention away?
- What's one strategy you can use to stay focused when life feels like fast-moving water?

Glacier Ice Relay (10-15 minutes)

This game works best with any number of youth.

Prep It: Have empty bowls, ice cubes, and chopsticks on hand.

Set It Up

In this game, you're carrying something small, fragile, and important, something that could slip away if you're not careful. That's exactly what today's game is about. This game, the Glacier Ice Relay uses ice to help us explore the power of attention. Water is everywhere in our lives, but it's easy to take for granted. In the specific case of glaciers, these natural formations are slipping away more and more every year?

- Divide into teams.
- Give each team a pair of chopsticks and two empty bowls to set on either side of the room. One bowl will be the Ocean, the other the Community.
- Fill the Ocean bowl with ice cubes.
- One player at a time, take an ice cube with the chopsticks & must get it to their Community bowl.
- If they drop the ice cube, they must pick it up with the chopsticks and continue.
- When they get back to their Ocean bowl, the next person can go.

Discuss It

- What helped you to be successful in this relay?
- Why is it important to pay attention to glaciers slipping away?
- In photos glaciers can be seen receding every year. What other natural changes have you observed?
- What natural wonder do you want to see before it might slip away?

Spiritual Practices

Litany of Water (10 minutes) (Adapted from [WATER: Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual](#))

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather a pitcher of water and bowls for each youth. Consider printing this page if you would like each youth to read a line from the ritual.

Set It Up

This ritual was crafted by the WATER Women's Alliance in honor of World Water Day to call attention to our most precious resource.

All nations require a safe, plentiful supply of water. We recognize that it is water from which all life emerges, and its innate properties sustain that life, quench thirst, cleanse, purify, and restore clarity. Today, we call attention to the global water crisis.

We gather for a ritual to restore our personal, collective, and international balance. Let us pause and take a deep breath as we celebrate the return of spring, give thanks for the life-giving element of water, and pray for healing of all waters.

Do It

- Read the following or ask youth to each read a section.
- We are lucky to have water, as so many go without. Let us each pour water from a pitcher into our bowls. Hold your bowl of water.
 - The Source of Life blesses creation with water. Let us say, "Blessed are you, Source of Life."
 - Living Water, Source of Life, your spirit moves over the waters at creation. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You form new life in the waters of the womb. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You renew Earth with winter snows and spring rains. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You dance your people through water to promised lands. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You water our gardens to bring forth food. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You give us water to wash our hands and cleanse our wounds. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - You quench our thirst and refresh our weariness. Blessed are you, Source of Life.
 - Be for us always a river of hope springing up in the midst of the deserts of despair.
 - Blessed are you, Source of Life.
- Hold your bowl of water, look into this well, and see your reflection. Let us bless ourselves with water.
- Touch the water. Think of a part of the body you would like to bless. Let us bless ourselves.
- Touch your mouth. Bless my mouth, that I may speak truthfully about the water crisis.
- Touch your ears. Bless my ears, that I may hear the rain and hail.
- Touch your nose. Bless my nose, that I may smell the Earth after a storm.
- Touch your eyes. Bless my eyes, that I may see children who need a drink of water.
- Touch your hands. Bless my hands, that I may remember those who do not have clean water to wash their hands.
- Touch your feet. Bless my feet, that I may be a water carrier for justice.
- Let us extend our hands to the world. Bless the Earth with water.

Discuss It

- What did it feel like to take part in a water ritual?
- How did this experience compare to our usual UU ritual of Water Communion?
- Was there a certain part of the ritual that called to you?
- Why do people find rituals to be a comfort to them?
- Do you know of other water rituals?

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

Today we've explored water in lots of ways with each activity asking you to pay close attention. Water is powerful, unpredictable, and essential, just like attention. When we slowed down to notice how it moved, how it carried color, or how fragile it could be, we saw that our choices matter. Water reminds us that even small actions can have a big impact on the world around us.

- Which activity made you feel most connected to the water, and why?
- What did you notice about water today that you hadn't thought about before?
- What does water symbolize in your life?
- If water could teach you one thing about paying attention, what do you think it would be?
- How do you think paying attention to water in nature could help protect it in the real world?

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 Five:

The Power of Paying Attention to The Wisdom Within

Theme Angle

All month long, we are exploring how powerful attention is. This week, we are focusing on The Power of Paying Attention to The Wisdom Within. As we do that, we will have a chance to focus on how we can trust and tap into inner resources, such as our conscience.

Light It!

Centering or Chalice Lighting Quotes



Chalice Lighting

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

As we read these words from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s *A Testament of Hope*, may we always pay attention to the voice inside of us that is our conscience:

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right."

Introduce It

Theme Connection and First Thoughts Sharing



Our Inner Voice

Suggested Introductory Words

All month, we've been exploring how powerful attention can be: how paying attention to others, to the world, and to what's happening around us can shape our choices and our communities. Today, we're turning that attention inward. Each of us carries a kind of inner wisdom. It doesn't always speak loudly, and sometimes it feels like a quiet sense of "this feels right" or "something about this doesn't sit well."

So, to begin, let's ask our first question.

Can you think of a time when you had a feeling that something was right or wrong, even before you could fully explain why?

(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

Inner Compass (15 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather paper and drawing materials. You may also want to have rulers and bowls the youth can use to trace a circle.

Set It Up

When people talk about following their conscience or trusting their inner wisdom, they're often describing something like an inner compass. A compass doesn't tell you exactly where to go or what obstacles you'll face, but it helps you figure out which direction is true for you. Our inner compass is shaped by many things: our values, our experiences, and the people who taught us. Learning to pay attention to it takes practice.

Do It

- Have the youth draw or trace a large circle on their papers. This is their inner compass.
- Ask them to divide their circle into four sections, like a compass rose.
- In each section they will write or draw something that guides them in their decision making.
 - Ex: A value they care about (fairness, kindness, courage); a person who influences their choices; a feeling that helps them know something matters; a belief or principle they try to live by; a personal mantra, etc.
- They can then decorate their compasses however they want to represent what guides them.
- When they are done, invite anyone who wants to share.

Discuss It

- Was it difficult to think of what guides you?
- Which of the items on your compass were the easiest to think of?
- Which part of your compass do you wish was a little stronger?
- Are there things you would like to be guided by that aren't on your compass?
- What tends to pull you off course?

Letter to Myself (15-20 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Prep It

Gather writing paper, pens, and envelopes.

Set It Up

For this next activity, we're going to practice paying attention to ourselves, not just who we are right now, but who we are becoming. One way people reflect and grow is by writing letters to themselves. It can feel a little strange at first, but it's actually a powerful way to slow down and listen to your own thoughts, values, and hopes.

This letter is a chance to notice what matters to you right now: what you care about, what you're proud of, what you're worried about, or what you want to remember when things get hard. Finding this voice inside of you and listening to it is part of building wisdom and learning to trust your inner compass.

Do It

- Have students write letters to themselves in the future, focusing on what their future selves should know about who they are in this moment.
- They can think about what is important to them, what is weighing on them, what they are looking forward to. They can give their future self advice. They can write down what they hope their future self is doing.
- They can take home their letters to keep and open at an agreed upon time, or you may choose to hold onto them and mail them at a future point.
- Remind them that they will not be asked to share with one another. These letters are just for them.

Games

Five Daily Tasks (10 minutes) (Adapted from [Fun Attic Campfire Games](#))

This game works with any number of youth.

Set It Up

This game asks us to practice two kinds of attention at once. First, we'll pay attention inward, noticing details about our own day. Then we'll pay attention outward, listening carefully to others and remembering what they've shared. You'll have to follow your inner compass to see if others are making up things or not.

Do It

- Form a circle and decide who will go first.
- Each player, when it's their turn, shares five simple, everyday things they did or experienced this weekend.
- Encourage ordinary details rather than dramatic ones.
 - Examples: "I ate ice cream." "I stayed up too late." "I read a book."
- Everyone else's job is to listen carefully, because you'll need to remember what each person said.
- After everyone has shared their five real moments, the first player shares one more statement about their day.
- This statement is either:
 - Something true that they didn't mention before, or
 - Something that didn't actually happen.
 - Or they repeat one of their original five.
- The rest of the group each decides which one of the three it is.
- They continue to go around the circle adding to their lists in the same manner.
 - Alternative: They can start to add more outlandish or detailed things to their lists.
 - The group can see if they can get all the way around the circle correctly guessing if something is true or not.

Winking Assassin (10 minutes) (Adapted from [Fun Attic Campfire Games](#))

This game works best with 5+ players.

Set It Up

This next game is all about how powerful attention can be, especially eye contact. In real life, a single look can communicate a lot: connection, challenge, humor, or trust. In this game, eye contact becomes the way information moves through the group.

Winking Assassin asks you to pay very close attention to faces, expressions, and reactions, while also being aware of yourself and how you're coming across to others. It's part observation, part self-control, and part performance.

Do It

- Secretly select an assassin from the group.
- Have everyone in the group close their eyes.
- Walk around the room and tap the shoulder of the youth who is the assassin.
- Have everyone open their eyes and start to walk around the room.

- As the players mingle, they need to make eye contact with one another.
- While walking around, the assassin's job is to wink at other players to "kill" them—without getting caught.
- When a player is winked at, they must dramatically act out their own death on the spot (the more over-the-top, the better!) and sit out for the rest of the round.
- If a living player suspects someone is the assassin, they may point and accuse. But be careful. An incorrect accusation means instant death for the accuser.
- The game continues until the assassin is caught or only one player is left standing.
- No speaking during the game except to accuse.
- The assassin must rely solely on winks—no gestures or verbal hints.
- Players must "die" as soon as they're winked at.
- When the round ends, have everyone close their eyes and choose a different assassin.

Discuss It

- In real life, what feels like "islands in a stream" for you? What are the places that give you refuge?
- What are some "streams" or distractions in your daily life that pull your attention away?
- What's one strategy you can use to stay focused when life feels like fast-moving water?

Follow the Whisper (10 minutes)

This game works best with any number of youth.

Set It Up

When we talk about listening to our conscience or inner compass, we often mention that it can be subtle or quiet. It takes care and attention to listen to it and to hone your ability to hear it. This game focuses on listening carefully to voices outside of ourselves. In this alternative version of Simon Says, you will have to make sure you are being quiet and focused to get the instructions.

Do It

- Choose someone to go first.
- That person will give instructions just like in Simon Says: "The whisper says to stand on one foot."
- If "the whisper says," then players have to follow the instruction.
- If "the whisper" doesn't say, then they do not.
- If they incorrectly follow a direction or fail to follow a direction, a player is out.
- The most important rule of this version is that the whisperer must whisper all of their commands.
- Once only one player is left, choose a new whisperer.

Spiritual Practices

Three Breaths (10 minutes)

This activity can be done with any number of youth.

Set It Up

We've been talking about attention all month and how what we notice shapes our choices, our relationships, and our communities. One of the simplest ways to practice paying attention is through our breath. Breathing is something we're already doing, but when we slow down and notice it on purpose, it can help us reset and become more aware.

This practice is called Three Breaths. It's short, simple, and something you can use anywhere. You can do it before a hard conversation, when you're feeling overwhelmed, or when you need to make a thoughtful choice. Each breath helps us direct our attention in a different way: toward ourselves, toward others, and toward what comes next.

Do It

- Find a comfortable position. If you want, you can close your eyes or soften your gaze. Let your shoulders relax.
- Take a slow breath in and out. As you breathe, notice how you are feeling right now. Think of what your body is doing and feeling. What is your energy right now? What is your emotional state?
- Just breathe with these thoughts. *(Pause.)*
- Take another slow breath in and out. As you breathe, think about the people around you or someone you'll interact with today. Notice that you are connected to others, and that your attention affects them.
- Just breathe with these thoughts. *(Pause.)*
- Take one more slow breath in and out. As you breathe, think about what comes next for you today. What is a choice you'll have to make, a moment you know is coming, or a challenge ahead. Think about how you would like to face that.
- Just breathe with these thoughts. *(Pause.)*
- When you're ready, open your eyes or lift your gaze. Take a moment to notice how you feel now.

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

In this session, we explored what it means to listen to ourselves, not just our impulses or emotions in the moment, but the deeper values, conscience, and experiences that help guide our decisions. Paying attention to our inner wisdom can help us navigate tough choices, stand up for what we believe, and act with integrity.

- How do you tell the difference between fear and inner wisdom?
- When is it hardest to trust yourself?
- Who taught you how to listen to your conscience?
- What is the most important thing your inner compass led you to?
- What helps you quiet the noise when you need to listen to yourself?

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.
 - 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: After your movie, invite youth into a follow-up group that ties it back to the theme.

Movie Suggestions for March's *The Power of Attention*:

The Lorax (2012)

"Twelve-year-old Ted (Zac Efron) lives in a place virtually devoid of nature; no flowers or trees grow in the town of Thneedville. Ted would very much like to win the heart of Audrey (Taylor Swift), the girl of his dreams, but to do this, he must find that which she most desires: a Truffula tree. To get it, Ted delves into the story of the Lorax (Danny DeVito), once the gruff guardian of the forest, and the Once-ler (Ed Helms), who let greed overtake his respect for nature." –[Source](#)

Theme connection: Paying attention to inequality and environmental impact

Raya and the Last Dragon (2021)

"Long ago, in the fantasy world of Kumandra, humans and dragons lived together in harmony. But when sinister monsters known as the Druun threatened the land, the dragons sacrificed themselves to save humanity. Now, 500 years later, those same monsters have returned and it's up to a lone warrior, Raya, to track down the last dragon in order to finally stop the Druun for good. However, along her journey, she'll learn that it'll take more than dragon magic to save the world--it's going to take trust as well." –[Source](#)

Theme connection: Paying attention to others, trust, and community.

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind (2019)

"A 13-year-old boy is thrown out of the school he loves when his family can no longer afford the fees. He sneaks into the library and learns how to build a windmill to save his village from a famine." –[Source](#)

Theme Connection: Noticing inequalities and responding with care, attention, and action.

Whale Rider (2002)

"Only males are allowed to ascend to chieftom in a Māori tribe in New Zealand. This ancient custom is upset when the child selected to be the next chief dies at birth. However his twin sister, Pai (Keisha Castle-Hughes), survives. At age 12, she enlists the help of her grandmother (Vicky Haughton) and the training of her uncle (Grant Roa) to claim her birthright. But to break with convention, she'll have to do the impossible: win over her ultra-traditional grandfather (Rawiri Paratene)." –[Source](#)

Theme Connection: Paying attention to wisdom within and cultural responsibility.

Other Intergenerational/All-ages Activities in this Packet:

From Session 1

- Blind Drawing Partners

From Session 2

- Visibility Posters
- Privilege Line

From Session 3

- Five Sense Cards

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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