

**Part 3: WORSHIP AS RESPONSE TO MYSTERY (HIGHER LEVEL)**

Syllabus Aim	To show how ritual and worship have always been part of the human response to life and to the mystery of God
Syllabus Objectives	As a result of studying this section, the students should: 1. have an awareness of the impact of the experience of mystery in human life
Key Concepts	reflection, encountering mystery, wonder
Description of Content	1. Exploring some responses to the encounter with mystery
Methodology	This lesson plan involves the use of a variety of methodologies including interpretation of data, group-work, self-assessment, simulation game, discussion and concept formation. In using this variety of methodologies students would be given an opportunity to explore and clarify the concepts, as well as elaborate on their existing knowledge and understanding of the content.

**Procedure**

*Introduction - reflection*

Read the poem:

TIME TO STAND AND STARE  
 What is this life if, full of care,  
 We have no time to stand and stare?  
 No time to stand beneath the boughs  
 And stare as long as sheep or cows.  
 No time to see, when woods we pass,  
 Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.  
 No time to see, in broad daylight,  
 Streams full of stars, like skies at night.  
 A poor life this if, full of care,  
 We have no time to stand and stare.  
 (from "Leisure" by H.W. Davies.)

Discuss:

1. What do you think the poet is trying to say about life?
2. The poet uses a lot of images from nature. Why do you think this is so?
3. Do you agree with the poet's words: "A poor life this if, full of care we have no time to stand and stare"? Why / why not?

or

*A Stillness Game* Introduce this as an opportunity for students to see if they can sit and be totally still.

- Instructions:
1. Find a spot on your own. (This can take place in class with students sitting separately or students could go to a large room / assembly area)
  2. Remain in complete silence and stillness for 3-5 minutes, until summoned by your teacher.
  3. In the silence identify what you can see/hear inside and outside the room.

When back in class discuss, either in groups, or in the full class:

- What did you see?
- What did you hear?
- What did you experience during the time of silence?
- Do you think that we need to regularly take time to be silent, to reflect? Why/Why not?

Take feedback from the students and conclude by emphasising the benefits of taking time for reflection in life.

*Encounter with mystery*

Sometimes people are able to look back and recognise that a certain experience filled them with wonder and made them reflect on the mystery of life. E.g. Read *The Golden String* - Bede Griffiths in

Topic 3G Recognising Signs of God – New Zealand National Centre for Religious Studies and discuss:

What did Bede Griffith notice that particular evening that was a surprise?

Why was this experience a key point in Bede’s life?

Have you ever had an experience that made you think about life? It may not have been to do with nature, but perhaps to do with travel, or sport, or illness, or death, or art, or music.

What kinds of experiences fill you with awe and wonder about life?

*Personal Assignment:* Give students time to complete the following self-assessment exercise.

People sometimes say that personal experiences have made them wonder and reflect on the mystery of life. Mark X beside the experiences listed below that made you reflect on mystery in life.

<i>Life Experiences:</i>		<i>Life Experiences:</i>	
Beauty of nature		Sickness	
Reading a book		Holidays	
Listening to music		Learning a new hobby	
A Birth		Being involved in a car accident	
A Death		A friendship breaking up	
Moving house		Other - Please state:	

Describe how two of these experiences made you reflect on life.

Take feedback from the students asking them to identify particular times in life when in the midst of the daily routine something filled them with wonder and made them reflect on the mystery of life.

Note feedback on the board.

Read Brendan Kennelly’s POEM OF A THREE YEAR OLD (Show Us the Way – The New Christian Way Series 2) and discuss: How many questions are asked by the three year old?

What are these questions about?

Which of these questions are about the meaning of life?

What questions of meaning do small children ask?

What questions of meaning do teenagers ask?

What questions of meaning do you ask?

What questions of meaning do adults ask?

*Written Assignment:*

Write your own poem containing the questions of meaning a fourteen-year-old might ask.

Take feedback from students on the questions of meaning a fourteen-year old might ask.

Discuss: Are there answers to all of these questions?

Which questions are the most difficult to answer? Explain.

Where could a person turn for answers to these questions?

Write the word MYSTERY on the board and brainstorm students as to what it means.

Conduct a vox-pop (ask people at random to finish the sentence: A mystery is..... ) or present students with the following statements:

- “A mystery is something that has so much meaning that the human mind cannot fully understand it.”
- “A mystery is not a wall against which you run your head but an ocean into which you plunge.”
- “A mystery is not a night; it is the Sun so brilliant that we cannot gaze at it, but so luminous that everything is illuminated by it.”

*Written Assignment:* Which of these statements comes closest to your own understanding? Explain

Take feedback from the written assignment and discuss:

What is the difference between a mystery and a problem?

Note feedback on the board emphasising the following points

A mystery is....	A problem is...
...a fact of existence which you cannot hope to fully understand or fathom, where the methods and tools of scientific enquiry are of limited use; a fact of existence into which you may gain insight but whose meaning you can never exhaust; a fact of existence with which you will have to live.	...a puzzle for which you hope to find a solution by means of scientific analysis; a question that must have some rational answer, even if no one knows what it is yet.

(adapted from *The Challenge of God* –N.Boyle)

*Assignment:* Which of the following would you put under the above headings:  
Workings of a T.V; Universe; Lightning; God; People?

Read the story SALT WATER in *Believe The Good News* page 30 - Garland & Kirwan /“Godtalk” by Kevin O’ Donnell. Discuss: What is the moral of this story?

Is the disappearance of the salt a mystery or a problem for the son?

*Written Assignment:* Finish the sentence A mystery is .....

### *Some responses to the encounter with mystery*

Read Jim Irwin describing the splendour of space in *To Rule the Night*, in *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* - William James and discuss:

1. What do you think the author means by “the secret awakenings that come from the inner flight....”?
2. How was the author affected by what he saw on his space flight?
3. Why do you think this is so?

and / or

Read Jim Bishop describing the birth of his daughter in *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*-William James and discuss:

1. The author asks a lot of questions about the birth of his daughter. Why do you think he does this?
2. How do you think the author answered these questions for himself?
3. In what way did the birth of his daughter make the author wondering about the mystery of life?

*Written Assignment:*

Write a paragraph on how people are affected by the encounter with mystery.

*Resources which teachers have suggested include:*

All About Faith 2 Gill & Macmillan, pages 8–16; 111-112; 120.

Believe The Good News Gill & Macmillan, page 30

Community of Faith Veritas, page 115

Cyberclass Manual Scholastech Disk 2

Love One Another pages 16; 50

Logos