

On the Journey

May 2025

Exploring themes for deepening wisdom



Creativity

These pages are a collection of readings, poems, artwork, and rituals meant to encourage us to consider our theme of creativity. Take note of the readings, poems, and articles that connect to your understanding of creativity and please bring to your groups other readings, stories, lectures, and articles that speak to you. May these pages be just the beginning as you and your group explore our May theme.

Gathering

Check-In

- What is on your heart as we gather?
- What do you need to leave at the door to be fully present in this space?

Chalice Lighting

Stories in the Making

~ Emily Richards

Some stories begin once upon a time, or long, long ago,
But other stories begin here, and now.
Those stories don't always have a clear direction,
Sometimes they don't even have a clear beginning.
What they do have is possibility.
Those are stories still in the making,
stories that have yet to be fully written,
stories with the potential to create change, for good, or ill.
We won't know how the story ends until we get there,
But we can decide what words we use to write those stories.
Words like hope, kindness, gratitude, peace, courage, perseverance, joy,
And love, above all else, love.

Connecting

Covenant

From our CUUC Covenant: “We foster the journeys of our congregants across generations while in the embrace of community.”

Our covenant is a living, breathing document that encourages us, holds us, in how we want to be in relationship with one another. Is there anything to add, change, or continue to consider as a group?

Invitation to Practice Trust

Checking in on our invitation last month, from CUUC Journey Group facilitator Jessica Lidh: At different moments throughout our lives, some of us find it helpful to lean into the belief that the Universe has its own plan. Some people might find comfort learning to TRUST that larger, cosmic blueprint. How can you learn to nurture that trust?

- How have you been thinking about trust over the last month?
- What is the relationship between trust and creativity?

Quotes and Thoughts

“Don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth.”
~ Rumi

“Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions.”
~ Albert Einstein

“Creativity takes courage.”
~ Henri Matisse

“Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.”
~ Pablo Picasso

“The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.”
~ *Sylvia Plath*, from *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

“You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.”
~ Maya Angelou

“Don't think about making art, just get it done. Let everyone else decide if it's good or bad, whether they love it or hate it. While they are deciding, make even more art.”
~ Andy Warhol

“The question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice – or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?... the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.”

~ Martin Luther King Jr., from *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*

“Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics.”

~ Virginia Woolf, from *A Room of One's Own*

“Remember: It costs nothing to encourage an artist, and the potential benefits are staggering. A pat on the back to an artist now could one day result in your favorite film, or the cartoon you love to get stoned watching, or the song that saves your life. Discourage an artist, you get absolutely nothing in return, ever.”

~ Kevin Smith, from *Tough Shit: Life Advice from a Fat, Lazy Slob Who Did Good*

“The San Francisco therapist kept telling me I shouldn’t be terrified of creative experimentation.

“I don’t know what’s going to come out of me,” I told her. “It has to be perfect. It has to be irreproachable in every way.”

“Why?” she said.

“To make up for it,” I said. “To make up for the fact that it’s me.”

~ Suzanne Rivecca

Crow and Pitcher

~Aesop's fable, retold by Faye Mogensen

It was a hot summer day. Crow thought he might die of thirst if he didn't find water soon. On wilted wings, he allowed himself to be carried hither and thither by the thermal winds. He rode them lazily until, suddenly, something caught his eye.

It was a pitcher perched on a garden table far below. The crow circled down to rest for a moment on its rim. He then bent down and poked his bill inside it. He couldn't reach the water. The pitcher was half empty, and his bill was not long enough.

The crow felt thirstier than ever, with water so close and yet out of reach. He teetered on the edge of the pitcher, feeling full of gloom.

But as he looked around the garden, an idea came to him. He sprang into action. Crow had noticed a pile of pebbles beneath the garden table. He flew down and picked up a “bill-full.”

He dropped the pebbles into the water, then flew down to collect some more. He repeated this several times over.

With each “bill-full” of pebbles, the water rose just a little high in the pitcher. After many trips, the water nearly reached the top. Crow bent down, drank his fill, and smiled a very satisfied smile.

- When has thinking creatively helped you?
- What are some things that encourage you to think more creatively?

Don't Think You Are Creative? Think Again! A Different Look At The Meaning Of Creativity And Why It's Important

~ Katie Trowbridge, at Curiosity2Create.org,

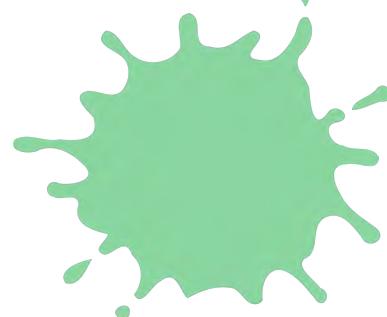
<https://www.curiosity2create.org/post/don-t-think-you-are-creative-think-again-a-different-look-at-the-meaning-of-creativity>

When you see the word creativity, what do you think of? An art museum? Van Gogh? Mozart? Maybe you think it's a waste of time or that you're not creative? While these statements are common, they aren't correct. Yes, creativity is often associated with art but that doesn't mean that creativity is all about being artistic. Nor does it mean that you're not creative if you don't draw, paint, or design clothing. Everyone is inherently creative, we've possessed this power since we were born.

Engaging in the creative process has immense benefits.

*Creativity:

- boosts mental health
- increases the ability to problem solve
- improves comfortability with change and failure
- embraces our curiosity



It may be easy to discount the importance of creativity. Why do we need creativity when we can search the internet for answers to our problems? But there is only so much we can look up online, and afterward, we still have to decide what to do with that information.

Adobe did a recent study on the state of creativity and reported that “research shows 8 in 10 people feel that unlocking creativity is critical to economic growth and nearly two-thirds of respondents feel creativity is valuable to society, yet a striking minority – only 1 in 4 people – believe they are living up to their own creative potential.” So with all that in mind, here is the standard definition of creativity, which has been acknowledged for over 25 years and goes back to 1953: “Creativity is the production of something new and valuable.” Let's break down the definition:

The production of – this may seem obvious, but being creative means you produced something that wasn't there before, or made things that were there even better. Maybe it's a treehouse for your kids that they love to play in. Or a system you made up that helps you organize your pantry. Or maybe you found yourself in a predicament at work when you accidentally erased your project file before a deadline, and you responded by quickly and miraculously recrafting a new document that frankly was even better. These outcomes were all the result of some level of creativity.

Something – points out that some sort of process takes place that results in some sort of outcome or product. If this wording seems vague, that is the point! The processes of an artist, an engineer, a marketing analyst, or a policymaker will all lead to a different kind of “something.” That something might be a physical product (a piece of art) or something more abstract (like a scientific theory). Whatever it is, to call the “something” creative there should be an aspect of it that is new in some way, meaning it didn't exist before.

Value – we aren't talking about monetary value here – although that is always nice. Something creative can be valuable to society, to an organization, to your community, to your family, or perhaps just you. If you come across a piece of art that someone is throwing away, and you just fall in love with it, then that art has value to you personally. And that's really all that matters, right? Also, if you spend six hours on a Saturday working on a poem that you never show anyone, you still might value how you were able to spend your time. Sometimes, the value is the process or experience. What's important is that whatever you produce gives you satisfaction or pleasure, saves your job and reputation, or otherwise improves your situation in one way or another.

For many of us, our natural default is “I'm not creative.” Yet, when you contemplate this definition, you can see that this idea is completely false. All of us have produced something new and valuable.

Still stuck? Consider these examples:

As a senior manager at a manufacturing plant, you are frustrated that costly mistakes often happen because of poor communication between teams. You analyze the process the teams are using and develop a new, more efficient protocol for communication that has high value: now everyone is informed when changes are made to complex processes, saving the company time and resources

As a high school student, you are involved in several activities and work part-time. You are feeling overwhelmed by your schedule and your “to-do list.” You decide it is time to figure out an organizational system that works for you. Knowing that you are a visual person you create a color-coded organization system for your classes, activities, and job. Now, it is easy to find what you need – when you need it.

As a homeowner, you want to redecorate or renovate part of your house but have a limited budget. You do some research then decide to learn a new skill or two so you can do some of the work yourself instead of hiring someone. You dig a little more and realize there is a way

to reuse things you already have, saving even more money. When your project is done, you have achieved a solution that is new (the whole point of redecorating, right?)

As a parent, you notice that your child is struggling to go to bed saying that he/she is afraid of the monsters under the bed. In order to help, you decide to create an anti-monster spray. You fill a spray bottle full of water, create a label, and tell your child that this solution will keep the monsters away. Before bed, you use the spray all around the room and reassure your child that the monsters will now stay away.

Creativity can be defined in a way that includes everyone. If you reflect on your day or week, we bet that you will notice ways that you were creative even if you didn't realize it at the time. Celebrate that! Embrace that!

When you see the word creativity, what do you think of?

- Do you consider yourself to be a creative person? Why or why not?
- In what ways do you express your creativity?

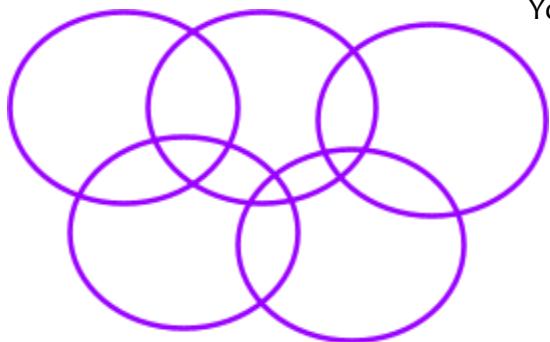
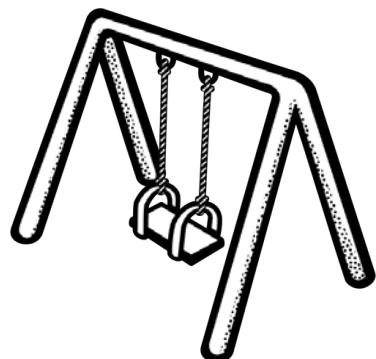
To Build a Swing

~ Written by Hafiz, translated by Daniel Ladinsky

You carry
All the ingredients
To turn your life into a nightmare-
Don't mix them!
You have all the genius
To build a swing in your backyard
For God.
That sounds
Like a hell of a lot more fun.
Let's start laughing, drawing blueprints,
Gathering our talented friends.
I will help you.
With my divine lyre and drum.

Hafiz

Will sing a thousand words,
You can take into your hands,
Like golden saws,
Silver hammers,
Polished teakwood,
Strong silk rope.



You carry all the ingredients
To turn your existence into joy,
 Mix them
 Mix them!

- If you could build, make, or create anything, what would it be? Why?
- What is the relationship between creativity and spirituality? How can creativity be used to express spirituality?

The Problem-Solution Paradox of Creativity

Neither avoiding nor over-focusing on problems leads to thriving creatively

~ Jeffrey Davis M.A., at PsychologyToday.com

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/tracking-wonder/201207/the-problem-solution-paradox-of-creativity>

If you avoid problems, you're not working in a creative mindset. If you seek solutions, you're not working in a creative mindset. This problem-solution paradox is another contradiction I've discovered in the science of creativity. This Wednesday I'll deliver an interactive talk on The Creative Mindset at Work at the Annual Giving Forum Conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. People in the non-profit business of training NPO grant makers to NPO's around the nation will be attending. I'm thrilled to talk and work with this group because this is where I thrive: helping people work more optimally with greater pleasure and gratification via a creative mindset. What a cool job these people have, right? Organizing groups who give money to smart ideals. Ideals to improve how our children are educated. How we live in diverse and thriving communities and healthy housing. How we support art that celebrates our diversity and enriches our daily lives, and more. And yet working for an NPO or a regional association that coordinates NPO grant makers seems anything but romantic. I've spoken and corresponded with some of them to glimpse their daily work lives.

Responding to Board member concerns, organizing and attending meetings, repairing email spam. It seems far from ideal and far from creative.

Sound familiar? Are many of your work days mostly about contending with one mundane problem after another? Do you ever imagine that if you just had the perfect job, your life would be less problematic?

A Problem-Free Life is a Fantasy Not Worth Feeding

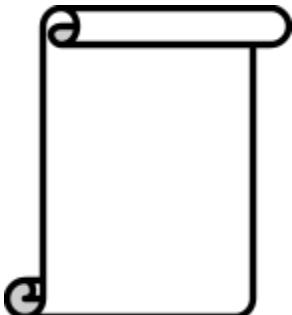
This work situation reminds me of Jonathan Fields' recent interview with Garden Cafe founder and owner Bart Potenza

(www.goodlifeproject.com/video/bart-potenza-candle-cafe-vegan). Potenza has flourished in the hyper-competitive New York City restaurant field for 25 years with his signature vegan restaurant. And what does Potenza think about most hours of the work day? About equipment. Whether or not the restaurant equipment will fail at the last minute and compromise customers' dining experience. Fantasizing about a problem-free, suffering-free life is a trap for aspiring creatives. If you're prone to escape problems, avoid the creative life. Creativity is imagination applied to making situations better – more effective, enriched, beautiful, meaningful, humane. Better. Creativity is imagination applied to enriching life. To improve a situation, you have to track what's problematic and apply your imagination to improving or solving it. This is what we human beings are biologically and spiritually driven to do.

So, a work life rich with problems is a gold mine for creativity.

Cultivating a creative mindset at work involves three tactics:

- * habits & systems to track and solve problems or to improve situations
- * habits to capture creative insight and convert them into action
- * workplace conditions to support problem-tracking and creative insight



So when a problem unexpectedly arises, being in a creative mindset prompts an open, flexible response instead of a closed, rigid reaction.

Hyper-Focus on Solutions is not the Solution

Does focus benefit creative problem-solving? On the face of it, yes.

What's the single distinguishing trait among exceptional and deeply gratified chess players, athletes, surgeons, scientists, writers, artists, and CEOs versus their "good enough" peers? The ability to concentrate for an extended period of time on a single issue, activity, or problem. That according to neuroscientist Richard Restak and a slew of follow-up studies. (Persistence and the pursuit of mastery are also at the top of the list among distinguishing qualities of field-busting creatives.)

So, yes, intentional focus is a foundational habit for deeply gratified creative people, regardless of field. But here's the contradiction: Over-focusing on a problem won't always lead to a solution. It might lead to frustration over the short run and burn out over the long run. Take Frank Offner's perspective. Offner invented the first electronic controls for jet engines. He – along with numerous other thriving creatives – discovered that over-focusing was counter-productive.

"If you want to solve a problem, don't sit down and try to solve it," Offner suggests in psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's seminal study *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of*

Discovery and Invention. A slew of new studies confirm that we might add two other complementary traits to the optimal creative's mindset tool belt:

- * awareness of awareness - what I call "Mirror Mind"
- * the ability to take intentional delightful divergences - Mind-wander-ness

A thriving creative person's path of thinking and living is, by its nature, not linear. But it also is not chaotic or formless.

A thriving creative person finds the right, flexible flow of focus and divergence, of problem-tracking and pleasure-tracking, of mind-watching and mind-wandering. Why? Because just like so many impressive and effective NPOs, so many thriving creatives challenge the status quo and empower the disempowered to make the world a better place.

- What are the benefits to you, to the people around you, or to society as a whole, of creativity?
- Are there any ways you would like to be able to express yourself more creatively, but haven't been able to for one reason or another (time constraints, lack of resources, etc.)?

Orange Energy

~ Jennifer Healey (<https://healingbrave.com/blogs/all/short-poem-about-creativity>)

All I want to do is delight— Throw the mask off, Not care and not worry, Not explain what I mean nor Define what I do. Just be whatever I feel like being. Just relish in the energy of this moment.	I want to love the color orange , Just because it craves delight too. I want to cry because I'm so in love with the miracle of Being alive. I don't want to feel like I'm Striving. I want to try and feel like I'm Flying. I want to write the poetry, Read the poetry, and Breathe the poetry.
I want to be so alive that I feel like the moon, Throwing tides just for fun, Creating because it's what I'm Here to do.	

I want my life to be a
Beautiful,
Messy mosaic that even I
Can't help but fall in love with.
Create! Create!
I feel the winds of fury
Blowing through me.
Even my bones are smiling.
I hear my veins pulsing with
Desire, like branches
Dancing in the breezes.
Wildflowers are waving and
The ocean blossoms with a new idea.
Crazy and beautiful is
How I want my life to feel.
Let it be. Let it be.
I write to be free.
I read to tap in.
I absorb the poetry.
And so it shall be.
And now I am this energy.

- If you feel “stuck” creatively, are there tools that you have that help get you unstuck?
- In what ways do you think your creativity could be enhanced?

Embodying

Invitation to Practice

You may have noticed a few “oops” on this journey packet.

Someone placed a cup of coffee on it. Someone else doodled in the margins. Who crumpled up the crow story? Someone else dropped, is that slime? And orange spray paint?



Can you turn the “oops” in this packet into something else? As you go through your next month with creativity on your mind, think about an “oops” that happens. Is there a way to turn it into something beautiful, interesting, silly, or into a small joy? Maybe it’s art, maybe it’s creatively solving a problem, maybe it’s something no one has thought of yet. You will be invited to share your creative spark in June.

Releasing

Chalice Extinguishing

Let us sing the magic of imagination

~ Susan L Van Dreser

Let us sing the magic of imagination by which we know one another
and learn the lives of eras gone by.

Let us sing the magic of creation by which we build the world of our soul
and teach its wisdom to others, young and old.

Let us sing the magic of our lives together, holding and shaping by the movement of breath
from heart to lung all new life that is to come.

Go now with singing. Go now with magic in your fingertips. Touch this world with life.

Checkout Question

- In one word, what is something you will take with you from our gathering?

For the Road



Check out our community playlist filled with music celebrating our theme for the month. Sometimes only music can bring us into our bodies, into our hearts, so deep we can't help but tap our feet to the beat: bit.ly/JGmusic-May25

*The journey is long.
The journey is beautiful.
The journey is hard.
Know this, beloved: you never journey alone.*



On the Journey is produced by the Unitarian Universalist congregations of Westchester County, New York, for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme.

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