



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



November 2021
Holding History

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family Holding History?

My family of origin, like so many others, includes people with heritage from several parts of the world: Northern European, West African, Southeastern Native American, and Southeast Asian. This diversity of descent, and of present lived experiences, has been both an incredible gift, and a trying challenge as we have grappled together with living in a society that was built on the oppression of some of our ancestors to the benefit of others. Sometimes we've gotten it right, and sometimes we've gotten it wrong. Literally, we come back to the same tables year after year to try again together.

This is our collective story, really; how do we hold this history together, as a people? How does our faith steady, strengthen, and inspire us as we celebrate and account for our shared past? This is what we explore together this month in our families. So, before we go any further, know that this month's theme can be fraught and complex for some of us. Proceed through this packet gently, at the pace of self-discovery that is opening to your heart rather than tightening.

One piece of holding our history that we hope each person will engage is featured in our At the Bedside section, where we retell the story of our faith's symbol, the flaming chalice. UU leader Natalie Briscoe says that one important way that our faith identities are formed is by knowing that "We are from the people who tell this story." This story of the flaming chalice is unique to Unitarian Universalism, it contains many of our still-cherished values, and its setting is a profoundly painful time in global history. This is an important story, and now is an important time to remember it.

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Holding History Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. What's the story of your birth? Is there something about your own birth that you've always wanted to know? (The questions that arise here may or may not be able to be answered; hold the questions in love if they remain a mystery even after being asked.)
2. How many Thanksgivings back can you remember? **
3. What's the history of the home you live in? When was it built? What was the neighborhood like then?
4. Who in the family is most likely to tell stories about the way things used to be?
5. Which is your favorite old photo of yourself and/or your family?
6. If you could go back in time and visit a historical event, which would it be?
7. If you were to create a [time capsule](#) to tell people in the future about what our times were like, what would be the 5 most important things you would include?
8. What are the favorite parts of the history of your pets? Do you remember first meeting them? What was it like to train them?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.

**One way to decolonize your family's celebration of Thanksgiving might be to create a menu comprised entirely of Native dishes, including locally sourced foods. [Here are](#) some recipe ideas.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Holding History

This month's treasure hunt sends us sleuthing around--in our neighborhoods, but also online, and in the memories of friends and neighbors. Don't feel the need to proceed through this like a list. Rather, pick a few that feel sparkly and exciting to you, and delve into those. The treasures here will be both the process of discovery, and the stories that unfold!

- What did the street you live on look like 50 or 60 years ago? *
- Who lived in your home before your family?
- Which would you guess to be the oldest tree in your neighborhood?
- Who in your neighborhood lived through the Great Depression?
- When did your UU group first begin to gather, or when did your congregation join the UUA, or when was your church building built?
- Who were/are the original peoples of the land that you now call home? How might you [acknowledge](#) that?
- What's the history of how your town got its name?
- What's the history of how your town became a town?
- What's the oldest building in your town?
- How much hotter is your hometown than when you were born? (check [here](#))

*For example, the picture on this page depicts three North Florida beachgoers, Alice Martin and two friends, circa 1960. ([State Archives of Florida](#)) At the time, Jim Crow laws in the South meant that public spaces were legally segregated. The shoreline where these young people stand was the only beach open for Black Americans in Okaloosa County. In 1964, in response to decades of work on the part of civil rights activists, all Florida beaches were desegregated. Today, this location, John C. Beasley State Park, is a popular public beach where a historic marker tells this part of the site's history.



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our "From the Mailbox" section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. Together each month, as a Soulful Home community, we open and accept these "invitations" to join some of the many brave, inspiring and wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating a future that is actively anti-racist.

Histories that are Hard to Hear: Lynching in America

Lynching is an act of racial terrorism, intended to control Black communities through fear and therefore upholding a white supremacy culture. The Equal Justice Initiative's project, "Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror," is a collection of beautifully presented oral histories from families' members of individuals who were lynched in America between 1877 and 1950. You can listen to their stories [here](#). The stories contain both deep grief and rising resilience; consider listening to the stories in full first so that you might decide how and when to share this information with sensitive and younger family members.

There's no action item with this beyond bringing these stories into your consciousness.

You can donate to the Equal Justice Initiative [here](#).

Heroes and Hate Crimes: Violence Against Sikhs Since 9/11

This year being the 20th anniversary of 9/11, September was awash with stories of that event's heroes. A history that's harder to hold, but which persists, is the violence and discrimination that many Sikhs face because--to borrow the title of Daily Show clip--confused Islamophobes target Sikhs, whose turbans often make them very visible in our communities. A 2009 study showed that 60% of Sikh children who wore turbans faced bullying at school.

Spend some time this month checking out the resources from the [Sikh Coalition](#), and be sure to follow the [Unitarian Universalists for Sikh Awareness Facebook](#) page.

In this month of food and gratitude, if your means allow it, donate to American Sikh Sonny Kakar's wildly popular free food truck project, [Seva Truck](#), which is the vehicle through which he lives out his faith's core values of sharing a meal with someone who is hungry.



At Play

Playing Games with Holding History

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: East of the Rockies

In 2019, the National Film Board of Canada released an experiential augmented reality app called [East of the Rockies](#), based on the story of Yuki, a Japanese-Canadian girl in the 1940s whose family was forced to relocate to an internment camp during and after World War II.

Japanese internment, both in Canada and the United States, was a shameful program with devastating, generational consequences for citizens of Japanese descent. Through this experience, we practice holding lesser-told and often downplayed histories with a willingness to engage, connect, learn, be inspired, and strengthen our resolve to do better.

The game, which is available on Apple platforms, costs \$3.99, and is suitable for all ages if younger children and not-yet readers can receive technical and reading help from adults in the home).

Option B: Bean Game

This game of chance, which comes from the Cherokee cultures of the American Southeast, can be played indoors or out. You'll need:

- Seven large, flat beans, or peach pits, or similar. The seven beans/seeds/pits should be colored on one side. (So, if you used Lima beans, perhaps you would smudge one side of the beans with charcoal or use a Sharpie marker to color the one side black.)
- Enough corn kernels for each player to have about 50
- A small container for holding each individual's corn kernels
- A large, shallow bowl, or paper plate, or shallow basket

The goal of the game is to flip as many beans as you can from the blank side to the colored side. Players get points for however many beans they can flip while keeping them in the bowl or basket, or on the plate.

- Decide ahead of time how many rounds will be played. Play begins with all the beans placed on the bottom of the bowl, blank side up. Players will take turns with the bowl.



- The first player gently shakes the bowl in an attempt to flip the beans from the blank side to the colored side.
- Count up the number of successfully flipped beans. That is the player's score for the round. Use the corn kernels to keep track of the score to make it easier to tally at the end. Beans that fell out of the bowl do not count.
- A slightly more complex scoring system for this game, as well as some background information, can be found [here](#). The simplified version we describe above draws heavily from one that Christian Weaver, then Direction of Operational Development for the Boys and Girls Club of America's Native Services Unit, and enrolled member of the Shinnecock Nation, [published in 2017](#).



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

November’s Mantra:

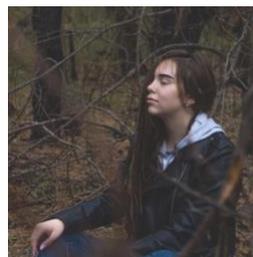
Breathing in, breathing out

The air we breathe is the same air our grandparents breathed, the same air that paleolithic people breathed, the same air that the very first trees breathed, the same air that the earth itself breathed when creating our precious atmosphere. Breathing is the first thing we do on the planet, and it will be the last. Breath is what marks our entrance and exit from this existence.

For this month’s mantra, we turn not to centering words, but instead to an action: draw in, hold, and release the precious breath that connects us to all things that have ever lived, and that ever will. This is our molecular history, the one that makes up every atom of us.

At a quiet time of your choosing, set a five-minute timer on your phone or other device and focus only on the tiny circles of skin around each of your nostrils. Keep your awareness on those two, dime-sized spots, noticing the sensation. Words and phrases will doubtless come up as your mind tries to describe, qualify, and assess the situation. Let those words come and go, but don’t linger on them. Instead, come back to the simple experience of breathing in, breathing out.

Set aside a regular time each day to practice this. You might keep the time limit at five minutes, or you might try to work up to longer meditations. A mind that is able to hold stillness, for five or 55 minutes is better able to act with clarity and integrity in trying times, a great boon to us as we navigate challenges both personally and collectively.



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

Circles of Light: Holding our Unitarian Universalist History

In preparation for this special, faith-deep bedtime, find your family's chalice, or use this as an opportunity to buy or make one. The night that you tell the story of how the chalice came to be the symbol of UUism, have the chalice and a candle handy. Ask or help your child to light the flame and set it where you can see it as you read.

This story is adapted from Janeen K. Grohsmeyer's, "Circles of Light: The Flaming Chalice," which appears in her book, [A Lamp in Every Corner](#).

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/home/session2/60017.shtml>

For Discussion:

- What does the flaming chalice mean to you?
- What does this story of the history of the flaming chalice tell you about Unitarian Universalists?
- This story is 75 years old. What story of Unitarian Universalism do you hope gets told 75 years from now?



On the Porch

Raising a Child Holding History Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

Three Pictures of this Moment

We often associate history with words wrapped into story. But there are other ways to communicate our understanding of our pasts, as well as our present and future. For this activity, you’re going to find three pictures to present to your trusted friend or partner. If you have the trove of family photos, feel free to choose from them. But you can also choose images of art, landscapes, comics, etc. Having physical photos or printouts is nice, but creating the collection on your phone is fine, too.

Your three pictures will represent three facets of your own past. You might find three pictures that represent...

- time periods, such as very young childhood, youth, and young adulthood,
- the three main influences on your life across your childhood,
- three pivotal moments of your choosing,
- or another division of your choosing.

When you present these to your conversation partner, tell them why you chose what you did, then ask them for feedback. Do the same for them.



Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What's the story of your childhood, in just a few sentences?
2. What do you remember most about your childhood home?
3. How did you come to live in the home you now live in? What were the blessings and challenges that led to that circumstance?
4. Whose story from your own past abruptly ended, because of death or loss of contact? Where would you like to imagine that person would be now?
5. What is the hardest part about reconciling your personal history with the history of your nation? Where do you get stuck in this history, and where do you move through with resolve?
6. We hold some histories in our bodies, through our genes handed down from our ancestors. What aspect of your physical self most connects you to them? How do you feel about this connection?
7. What memory has been with you the longest?
8. We all "stand on the shoulders" of those who came before. Whose shoulders are you most grateful for?
9. In her wonderful poem, [Remember the Sky](#), Joy Harjo invites us to remember the fullness from which we come. Where does Harjo's poem take you?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

A different kind of baby book

Babies born in 2018-2021 will have had a unique infancy and early childhood. But because most of us don't have memories before age 3-4, they won't recall much of what has happened in the world. As a family, make a kind of baby book for a baby in your life, using words and pictures--maybe even mementos--for them to look back on and know this part of their own history.



Blessing of Holding History

Holding history, we bless one another's bodies, which our ancestors knit together under circumstances so different from our own.

Holding history, we bless one another's families--of birth and of choice--whose struggles are our struggles, whose triumphs are our triumphs.

Holding history, we bless each other's homes, settings of our origin stories, settings, too, of our present becoming.

Holding history, we bless one another's children's children's children; when at last our own spirits and bodies are returned to the Source of Life, it is the world we made that will hold them, and in their acts of goodness in which we'll hope to persist.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Credits

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