

A PRACTICE TO ACCOMPANY YIZKOR ON YOM KIPPUR

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This exercise is written as a lesson plan, but works equally as well for personal reflection. It is possible to do Activity 1 and 2 on their own if you'd like to do an abridged version. It is also set up so that you can work through it over time, rather than all at once.

LESSON GOAL:

To make space to honor loss(es) and create space for grief and healing.

LESSON OVERVIEW:

We will use poetry, storytelling, and writing as a catalyst and device for exploring the various losses we have experienced both personally and globally this past year, while making space for grieving and healing through reflection and writing activities.

MATERIALS:

- Something to write with – (either a utensil & paper, and/or computer or tech-based)
- A comfortable place to be present

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES / SELF-AGREEMENTS:

- Confidentiality/privacy: Whatever you write during this lesson belongs to you. You have control over whether or not you keep everything to yourself, or share it with others.
- Annotate & ask questions: This lesson is designed to be exploratory and thoughts and feelings expansive. Feel free to take notes in the margins. Ask questions out loud or on the page. You don't have to have solid answers. It's an opportunity to engage and reflect.
- It's ok to be messy: You don't have to have everything figured out. This is an opportunity to take risks, process and reflect, and try out new ideas or thoughts.

TIMELINE:

5 minutes – Opening Reflection

10 minutes – Text Reading

15 minutes – Writing Activity

5 minutes – Blessing / Ritual

2 minutes – Closing

37 minutes – TOTAL

LESSON PLAN

Opening Reflection: (5 minutes)

1. Make a list of 5 to 10 things for which you are grateful from this past year.
1. Make a list of 5 to 10 things for which you have grieved this past year.
1. Some questions to consider (feel free to think about your responses / answers, and/or write or journal your thoughts on paper):
 - What do you like, notice, or wonder about the lists you've made?
 - Are there feelings you noticed yourself having while writing and reflecting on your lists? If so, where do these feelings show up in your body?

Text Reading: (10 minutes)

1. Read the following poem "[not an elegy for Mike Brown](#)" by [Danez Smith](#).



Note

Feel free to take notes and annotate (underline, circle, highlight, record questions that arise) as you read. Feel free to recite it out loud if that's comfortable and/or accessible to you. Feel free to read it in your head. Feel free to also watch and/or listen to [a video performance](#) of the poet sharing the piece.

not an elegy for Mike Brown

By Danez Smith

I am sick of writing this poem
but bring the boy. his new name

his same old body. ordinary, black
dead thing. bring him & we will mourn
until we forget what we are mourning

& isn't that what being black is about?
not the joy of it, but the feeling

you get when you are looking
at your child, turn your head,
then, poof, no more child.

that feeling. that's black.

\\

think: once, a white girl

was kidnapped & that's the Trojan war.

later, up the block, Troy got shot
& that was Tuesday. are we not worthy

of a city of ash? of 1000 ships

LESSON PLAN

launched because we are missed?

always, something deserves to be burned.
it's never the right thing now a days.

I demand a war to bring the dead boy back
no matter what his name is this time.

I at least demand a song. a song will do just fine.

\\

look at what the lord has made.
above Missouri, sweet smoke.

2. What are your reactions to this poem?

- What stood out?
- What did you notice?
- What resonated?

Writing Activity: (15 minutes)

1. We're now going to think about loss—especially within the context of the past year—as an opportunity to name, acknowledge, considered, and hoping begin to grieve the things, experiences, people, and anything else we have sadly lost. That said, there may also be things you realize you've lost in this past year that feel important or good or helpful or healthy to have lost. All of it is fair game here.
2. The following writing activity will be an opportunity to more specifically reflect on the various losses you, your community, your local/regional areas, and the world have lost by considering two questions for each area of your life. “Loss” can be defined however you want, though to support you in your reflection, we've provided some examples, in case they help. Feel free to write your responses to each question as sentences or in a journaling format, or as a bulleted list, or as a visual drawing or image representation, and/or as a thought exercise.

Examples of loss

- Loss of an object / material item
- Loss of freedom / legal rights / systemic access
- Loss of healthcare / health needs
- Loss of a relationship
- Loss of a person or a living being
- Loss of a job
- Loss of a source of income
- Loss of a routine
- Loss of a goal or a dream
- Loss of security – literal or figurative
- Loss of something creative and/or abstract

Personal / Self

- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is personal / internal / self?

- What barriers / things / experiences / events have kept you from acknowledging / grieving?

Interpersonal / Communal

- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is interpersonal / communal?
- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is personal / internal / self?

Local / Regional

- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is local / regional?
- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is personal / internal / self?

Global / Earth

- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is global?
- What is a loss that you have yet to acknowledge and/or grieve that is personal / internal / self?

Blessing / Ritual (5 minutes)

1. In Jewish tradition, the Mourner's Kaddish has become a central prayer for mourning, especially as a container for grieving in by means of a ritual offering. Historically and halachically (according to Jewish law), the Mourner's Kaddish must be recited within the context of a minyan (a prayer gathering of 10 or more people). While plenty of people recite Kaddish on their own and/or outside the context of a minyan, in honoring that long-standing tradition, and given that this lesson is an activity you are most likely doing on your own as self-reflection, take a moment to consider an alternative blessing or prayer to the Mourner's Kaddish. It could be a Jewish prayer or text. It could be a favorite poem or song lyric or quote. It could be a blessing you make up on the spot now, or already have created for yourself and for your life. Whatever it is, choose this blessing or prayer, and recite it aloud or think it to yourself as a way to ritualize your acknowledgment, mourning, and grieving process regarding all of the losses you considered, reflected upon, and explored in the previous writing activity.
2. Here is an option from traditional Jewish liturgy you might consider using. You'll find feminine Hebrew pronouns followed by masculine pronouns in the Hebrew and transliteration. Modern Hebrew convention for gender-inclusive pronouns is to alternate between feminine and masculine gender.

El Maleh Rahamim/God Full of Compassion

El malei rachamim, shochayn bam'romim, ham-tzay
 m'nucha n'chona al kanfay Hash'china, b'ma-alot
 k'doshim ut-horim k'zo-har haraki-a mazhirim, et
 nishmat (Name of the Deceased) she-halcha/halach
 l-olomah/l-olamoh, Ba'avur sheAnahnu mitpallelim
 ba'avura/ba'avuro. B'Gan Ayden t'hay
 m'nuchatah/m'nuchato; la-chayn Ba-al Harachamim
 yas-tire-ha/yastiro b'sayter k'nafav l'olamim,
 v'yitz-ror bitz-ror hacha-yim et nishmatah/nishmato,

אל מלא רחמים שוכן במרומים, המצא
 מנוחה נכונה על כנפי השכינה במעלות
 קדושים וטהורים כזוהר הרקיע מזהרים
 את נשמת פלונית/מבית פלונית/
 שהלכה/שהלה לעולמה/לעולמו בעבור
 שאנחנו מתפללים בעבורה/בעבורו בגן
 עדן תהא מנוחתי/מנוחתו. לכן בעל
 הרחמים יסתיירה/יסתירהו בסתר כנפיו
 לעולמים ויצרר בצרור החיים את

God, full of compassion, Who dwells above, give rest on the wings of the Divine Presence, amongst the holy, pure, and glorious who shine like the sky, to the soul of (name of deceased), on account of our praying on their behalf. Therefore, may the Compassionate One protect them forever and bind their soul in the bond of life. May the Eternal One be their heritage, and may they rest peacefully at their lying place, and let us say: Amen.



Note

Perhaps you want to change positions or locations from where you've been doing this lesson and find another space for this ritual. Perhaps you want to close your eyes or invite yourself into a quiet and/or meditative space. Perhaps you want to do some deep breathing or mindfulness practices to usher yourself into this reflective and mourning ritual. Perhaps you take some time to notice how and where this ritual practice is showing up in your body and where it shows up.

Closing (2 minutes)

What is a single word or phrase that describes how you're feeling, something you learned, or something you're taking away from this lesson?

