

# UNDER THE WISDOM TREE

## SAMPLE LESSON 1

### **Main Issue:**

**What does it mean to respect the inherent worth and dignity of all beings?**

### ***The Roach Poachers***

*by Connie Dunn*

It was a hot, humid summer evening when I discovered the poachers. The children had just eaten popcorn and drank soda pop while watching a movie. It was our regular Friday night hang-out at the church.

I thought I was the clean-up crew, but looked around to pick up the near-empty bowl of popcorn. That's when I saw him. He was nearly two-inches long and he was eating a piece of popcorn that had jumped out of the bowl. He was staring up at me with two beady eyes, his antennae were moving and I thought I saw fangs coming out of his mouth gnawing on the popcorn.

He was a hungry critter. And I was not going to mess with him. There's nothing meaner than a hungry bug. He was armed with his ugly shell and I hopped back out of his way.

"Whoa!" I said rather loudly, when I realized my bug friend was not alone. There were others creeping out of their corners. Why there must have been a dozen or so, here and there.

But I was determined that they weren't going to take me. I was bigger than they were.

However, the popcorn-eating roach faced me and for all that I could tell, it looked like he had challenged me to a shoot out.

"Draw, partner!" I could almost hear him shout.

But I wasn't wearing my six-shooters. Heck, I wasn't even wearing my one-shooters. Well, I reckon I just wasn't wearing any shooters at all. And hey, did I tell you that this was a Unitarian church?

These poachers were smart. Why there was a Christian church across the street that was far bigger than our church. But they didn't pick that church to move in on. No! Well, by golly, the popcorn-eating roach whipped out his set of Principles and Purposes and was pointing out to me that as a good Unitarian Universalist, I was bound to respect the inherent worth and dignity of his being. Yep! And so it was, that the Roach population was allowed to move in with blessing.

I have no idea how we would have stopped them. No. Seeing as how our congregation believed in respecting the "Mother Earth." We were as "green" as a congregation our size could be. We no longer used pesticides. We didn't even own a can of bug spray. Yes. The poachers were moved to resident status.

It was touch and go, of course. With our Friday night shindigs going on, the roaches claimed we were infringing on their rights for a peaceful neighborhood to live in.

But we finally agreed that while it did seem to be their home during most of the week, we definitely held the superior occupancy right.

The roaches may have been poachers, but they weren't a stupid lot. They demanded their rights. They demanded their right to food.

Mr. Popcorn, as I came to call him, explained, "Look, it's this way. We got families to raise just like you. We made the decision to seek out residency here, because of your "green" standards. We don't want our children getting sick and dying. But we also don't want to starve to death. You've begun to leave things too clean.

"We found a small, gnawed cookie in the nursery last Sunday and it had to feed all the families that live here. Listen that just isn't enough. Now, I see you having pizza and popcorn and whole host of other foods, but do you think about the little guys. No! You never once thought about us lowly little roaches, scrounging for a living in such a sterile place as this Unitarian church. Listen, you guys are supposed to be much more sloppy in your cleaning up. I mean, me and my family are starving!! Do you get the picture?"

I got the picture. And my heart went out to the roaches. I agreed to clean up, but leave the roaches all the food that rolled way under the couches. I even agreed that we would purposely leave the lid off the trash can, so they could be assured of eating all week. After all, the roaches had families to raise, too.

So, last week, when we got to the church for our weekly hang out. Hey, the roaches had already rolled out the television set and were waiting to see what tape we had.

Mr. Popcorn asked, "So what are we watching tonight?"

I told him. And he was impressed. So, later in the evening, I noticed that Mr. Popcorn was snuggled up against one of the children eating popcorn. Jennifer was dropping most of her popcorn down to Mr. Popcorn. Well, it was the sweetest thing. Mrs. Popcorn thought it was cute, as well. She even took a

picture to hang on the wall of their house...that would be the inside walls of our church.

I left him something extra tonight. And I was wondering if his family had read all the books in the library.

But I needn't have worried, because Mr. Popcorn had read all the books past and present and was re-reading the ones about our historical past. He agreed to continue to review all the books and report back to me on his findings.

### **Major Theme Discussion:**

*(Depending on ages of your children, this can be done as questions or as a commentary. Some groups may require a bit of both. Included are some questions. Most of the answers relate to the story. However, there may be something you know the children can relate to better than the story to understand the value. All connections are a value lesson.)*

Who can tell me a value they found in the story? (**NOTE:** *There may be other values the children find in the stories.*) Did someone say inherit worth and dignity of each person? Yes. It is important to respect each of us as individuals worthy of our respect. Can anyone tell me what dignity means? Can anyone think of other values?

### **Supplies for Activities:**

1. 3-7 year olds  
Paints, paper
2. 8-11 year olds  
Index cards, markers.
3. 12 & up  
No supplies necessary.

### **Activities:**

#### **3-7 year olds**

##### ***Exploration***

Take the kids on an exploration of the play yard to find out what kinds of living things are there. Have them notice bugs and other animals, as well as plants and trees. Each time a child points out that he or she has found something, ask them if it has value. The point you are trying to make is that each creature has value just as all vegetation has value. You may need to explain how each of these fit into our interdependent web of life. Next, return to make paintings.

##### ***Paintings***

Have the children make paintings of self and others around us-it is okay if they draw plants and animals or even bugs as others.

## 8-11 year olds

### ***Make an Inherit Worth and Dignity game.***

On index cards, have the children write living things or beings that adds value to our world in some way. (**NOTE:** *This can be done individually or as a group.*)

After the group has pretty well used up all the animals or plants they can think of, have them turn the cards over and write a statement of value. For example, DOG. It's worth could be: Faithful Companion.

After the children have completed that task, shuffle the cards. Now, have the children individually come to choose a card. After they have chosen a card, they must act out the animal give a clue to its value. For example, if the card was a dog, then acting out the dog and that it is faithful will be your job.

## 12 & up: Discussion Group

*(If your group of teens are split between younger teens and older teens, you might think about setting up two discussion groups. However, you may be surprised to find that they all get along famously. Just watch for signs that the group is not working and adjust.)*

### **Discussion Topics:**

- What exactly does it mean to respect the inherit worth and dignity of others?
- Have you ever had a time when you did not respect someone's worth or dignity? Explain.
- Have you ever had a time when someone did not respect your worth or dignity? Discuss.
- Why do you think that UUs should respect other living creatures and vegetation? Explain.
- When you see others not respecting the inherit worth and dignity of others, what can you do? Discuss.