

Euthanasia

Lesson Plan: Grades K-6

Program for **Achieving Character Education**

www.catholicpace.com

OVERVIEW

Parent / Teacher

This lesson plan on Euthanasia follows the model of the PACE curriculum (www.catholicpace.com). In keeping with the goals of the PACE curriculum, this lesson plan exposes your students to morally sound concepts that can help them begin to navigate the very complex waters of our society's current climate.

The unique aspect of the PACE curriculum is its ability to approach important concepts—those that all young children need to learn—in a natural, fluid manner, which extends well beyond the classroom and throughout their lives.

Euthanasia is a controversial issue in our current society. Children are receiving information about this matter through a variety of means, including social media, and it is our responsibility as educators to encourage thought, study, and discussion about any and all such issues, including this grave violation of the 5th Commandment.

When we think of pro-life issues, we usually think of abortion, which is obviously—and sadly—one of the most important issues of our time. However, it is not the only pro-life concern; there is also an extreme lack of respect and dignity towards the elderly, the dying, and the handicapped in our society. Euthanasia and its surrounding issues are not easy to discuss with most young people but we can and should focus on the importance of respect and love for these people who are, as all human beings are, created in God's image.

TEACHING POINTS

Parent / Teacher

Euthanasia is the intentional killing of a person suffering from old age, an incurable or painful disease, or who is in a coma. In the United States, there are people who want to make euthanasia legal in every state. This is a sin, and the Catholic Church forbids it because:

- ✓ All life is a gift from God.
- ✓ Human beings are valuable because they are made in the image and likeness of God.
- ✓ Birth and death are part of the life processes which God has created, and so we should respect them.
- ✓ All people—newborns, young children, teens, adults, and the elderly, sick or healthy—deserve love and respect.
- ✓ No one has the right to kill another person, even if the person is sick, or even if that person wants to die.
- ✓ To propose euthanasia for an individual is to judge that the current life of that individual is not worthwhile.

QUOTATIONS

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary.

Pope St. John Paul II

Human persons are willed by God; they are imprinted with God's image. Their dignity does not come from the work they do, but from the persons they are.

St. Jeanne Jugan (foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor)

With the eye of faith, we must see Jesus in our old people—for they are God's mouthpiece.

Pope Francis

How great a lie...lurks behind certain phrases that so insist on the importance of 'quality of life' that they make people think that lives affected by grave illness are not worth living!

DEFINITION

Parent / Teacher It is important to define the word euthanasia, as well as the difference between euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

EUTHANASIA

"intentionally bringing about death by active intervention, or by neglect of reasonable care, in order to end suffering" (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference)

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED SUICIDE

"when a person is prescribed lethal drugs with which to kill themselves, with the purpose of eliminating suffering" (Australian Catholic Bishops Conference)

STORIES

Parent / Teacher

The stories below are taken from *The Book of Virtues* by William Bennett. Read the story aloud to younger students; older students may read independently. Several questions are included for discussion.

Grades K-3rd



“Grandmother’s Table” page 143

1. What were some habits of the old woman that annoyed her son and his wife?
2. Why did the old woman cry as she sat across the room from her family?
3. Did the son and his wife behave with compassion towards the old woman? Why/why not?
4. What made the family decide to invite the old woman back to the family table?
5. Do you think that people should be treated with dignity, even after they grow old and drop things and can’t take care of themselves?

Grades 4-6th



“The Iron Horse” page 496

1. What was Lou Gehrig’s illness?
2. How did Lou know that it was time to retire from baseball?
3. Discuss these lines from the story: “I may have been given a bad break but I have an awful lot to live for. With all this, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.” Why did Lou think this?
4. What do you think the people who were at the baseball stadium learned on Gehrig Appreciation Day?
5. Do you think that Lou Gehrig’s life was worthwhile after he became ill? Why/why not?

BIBLE PASSAGES

Parent / Teacher All Bible passages can be found in the *New Standard Revised Version Bible – Catholic Edition* (NSRV-CE). Discuss what these passages mean in terms of respecting life.

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

“He said, ‘Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’”

Job 1:21

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not Murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgement.’”

Matthew 5:21

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”

Proverbs 19:21

MARY & THE SAINTS

Parent / Teacher Discuss this meditation with your students. Then read about the saints who have fought for the dignity of the Elderly and Disabled.

Meditate on the Blessed Virgin Mary's visit to help her cousin Elizabeth who, in her old age, gave birth to St. John the Baptist. Mary was very happy when she heard that her cousin was going to have a baby. She also understood that her cousin would need help and rushed to her aid.

Prayer/Meditation:

Pray the "Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Life"

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/litanies/the-litany-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary.cfm>

St. Damien of Molokai was a Belgian saint who lived with and cared for lepers in Hawaii. Society wanted nothing to do with these people because of their illness, but St. Damien loved and cared for them, and eventually succumbed to the disease himself. He valued their lives despite their disabilities, reminding us that we should not forget people who are considered outcasts of society.

St. Teresa of Calcutta
Calcutta worked with the poorest of the poor living in the slums of India. She and the other sisters of her order, the Missionaries of Charity, worked to give dignity to these destitute people who society shunned and disrespected.

**SAINTS who fought for the
Dignity of the Elderly and
Disabled**

French **St. Jeanne Jugan** founded the Little Sisters of the Poor, an order known for its hospitality that was established specifically to care for the elderly. This order currently serves the elderly in over 30 countries by providing for the needs of the aged poor, giving them food, clothing, and housing.

Blessed Margaret of Castello was born blind and had a very severe problem with her spine and legs. Her parents were ashamed of her and kept her hidden in their home. Eventually, they abandoned her in the city of Castello, Italy. She was invited to join a Dominican order in Castello and spent the rest of her short life (she died at the age of 33) tending to the poor, visiting prisoners, and comforting the suffering. She is the patron of children with disabilities.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Parent / Teacher This section provides a list of books to read in conjunction with the topic of Euthanasia. These books can be part of your Language Arts curriculum, recreational reading, or extra credit.

Kindergarten-3 rd	Title	Author
	<i>Miss Rumphius</i>	Barbara Cooney
	<i>My Sister, Alicia May</i>	Nancy Tupper Ling
	<i>Grandfather's Wrinkles</i>	Kathryn England
	<i>Lou Gehrig: The Luckiest Man</i>	David A. Adler
	<i>Grandma Moses</i>	Alexandra Wallner

2-4 th	Title	Author
	<i>The Matchbox Diary</i>	Paul Fleischman
	<i>Through Grandpa's Eyes</i>	Patricia MacLachlan
	<i>Who Was Helen Keller?</i>	Gare Thompson
	<i>Louis Braille</i>	Margaret Davidson

3-5 th	Title	Author
	<i>Sara's Secret</i>	Suzanne Wanous
	<i>Who Was Franklin Roosevelt?</i>	Margaret Frith
	<i>The Hundred Penny Box</i>	Leo Dillon

6 th	Title	Author
	<i>Helen Keller's Teacher</i>	Margaret Davidson
	<i>The Summer of the Swans</i>	Betsy Byars
	<i>Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Biography</i>	William Anderson
	<i>The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus</i>	Jen Bryant

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Parent / Teacher

Choose a topic and open it up to the students to encourage understanding of the theme of Euthanasia.

- What do you think you can learn from having friends of many different ages?
 - Sometimes seniors, whether they are living in nursing homes or in their own homes, get lonely. Have you ever felt lonely? What helped you feel better?
- If people no longer work, do they still deserve care & respect from society?
 - Who are some special older people or handicapped people in your life? What activities do you do with them?
- Talk about how you would like to be treated when you're old.
 - Discuss this quote by Pope Benedict: "Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary."
- Does it seem important to visit older people? Why?
 - How would you feel if you couldn't run, or even walk fast - or if you couldn't get around to visit with your friends?
- Who are some special older people in your life? What activities do you do with them?
 - Do you have any friends or family members who are handicapped? What kind of struggles do they encounter in their everyday lives?
- Discuss the term "ageism" which is a tendency to discriminate against older members of society because they're seen as weak and unworthy of our attention.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Parent / Teacher

Give one or more of these assignments to your students. These writings may or may not be graded; they can be more of a creative lesson, although, as always, proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation are expected.

- ❖ Many senior citizens are lonely. Make a card for an older person in your family or neighborhood, telling them that you're thinking of them.

- ❖ Write about the ways in which the elderly are integrated into their families in different cultures.

- ❖ Saying that God created humankind in His own image doesn't mean that people actually look like God, but that people have a unique ability to see what is good and to want what is good. Explain what this means.

- ❖ We don't decide when our life will end, just as we do not decide when it began. But we do have a right, when we're ill or suffering, to proper care. Research "palliative care" for the dying and write a short essay about it.

- ❖ Explain this quote: "Our dignity is not dependent on our usefulness or health, but simply on our humanity." (Australian Catholic Bishops)

- ❖ Some people think that people who are old and sick should die. But we know that the elderly are a blessing in our lives. Write about an older person you know and how this person affects your and/or your family's life.

- ❖ Write about pet euthanasia: why is it morally acceptable to euthanize an animal but not a person? (Hint: people are created in the image and likeness of God; we have stewardship over animals)

- ❖ Draw a picture of a person you read about in one of your books or stories.

- ❖ Read about The University of the Third Age Movement (or the Third Age Learning Movement), started in France in 1973. This is an educational movement geared towards people aged 50 and older, providing learning opportunities for those in this age bracket. Write a short essay about this educational movement, including which countries have adopted it most successfully and what you personally think of it.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

Parent / Teacher

This section reinforces what your students have learned about the topic of Euthanasia. It includes activities in the areas of: Art, Music, Nature, and General. Most of these Enrichment Activities can be conceptually tied in to other subjects in your curriculum such as Art, Music and Science, Religion, and Language Arts. The Enrichment Activities should be done with all of your students—as a group—if possible.

A. Music:

- Listen to a recording of a song by Andrea Bocelli, a blind Italian singer. His most famous songs are *Con Te Partirò (Time to Say Goodbye)* and *Sogno*.
- Beethoven is regarded as one of the best composers in the history of the world, but many people do not know that he wrote some of his greatest works when he was almost totally deaf. These masterpieces include his last 5 piano sonatas, *9th Symphony*, and *Missa Solemnis*. How difficult must it be to write music that you cannot hear! These musical pieces should be easy to find online or at your local library.
- Country singer and songwriter Willie Nelson is still performing and writing music at the age of 86! Listen to some of his songs or read about his long life in the music industry.

B. Art:

Study these paintings:

- *American Gothic* by Grant Wood (elderly people, hard workers)
- *Le Bassin Aux Nymphéas* by Claude Monet (painted when he was 77)
- *Christina's World* by Andrew Wyeth (girl with polio)

C. Nature/Science

- Do some research about Alzheimer's, a progressive mental deterioration that sometimes occurs in old age. What is the difference between Alzheimer's & dementia?
- Read about the life of Dr. Leila Denmark, an American pediatrician who practiced medicine until the age of 103.
- Take a look at some recent inventions that improve the lives of people with disabilities. Some examples: *Eye Play the Piano* (a system that allows for a person to play the piano without using their hands or arms); the *Smart Belt* (a device that picks up signs of an incoming seizure to help people with epilepsy); the *Upsee* (a harness to help people with cerebral palsy).

D. Classroom Projects:

- Watch the movie *The Miracle Worker* about the life of Helen Keller, a handicapped (deaf and blind) woman who became an American author and lecturer. She was also the first deaf and blind person to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree.
- Read about the work that St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) did with her Missionaries of Charity, even when she was in her 70s and 80s. Consider taking up a collection amongst friends and family members and send a donation to the Missionaries of Charity, who carry on her work with the "poorest of the poor."
- Create hand-made cards to send or deliver to a local nursing home or to elderly people in your neighborhood, so that they know that someone is thinking about them.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Parent / Teacher This final section provides practical suggestions for showing respect and dignity for the aged and handicapped, implementing what has been learned in this lesson plan.

- Sit down with an elderly family member, friend or someone at a nursing home and ask them questions about their lives. Many older people enjoy talking about the past.
- Bring crayons and blank paper or coloring books (or even paint-by-number!) with you on a visit with an elderly person. This is an excellent activity for senior citizens as it helps them to concentrate on a task & also provides a creative outlet.
- Make a lap blanket or another comfort item for an elderly or disabled person. There has been some research in the area of “weighted blankets” for people with dementia. The heaviness of the blanket provides a gentle pressure that promotes calmness and can improve their mood.
- Bring audio books to someone who has trouble with his or her eyesight.
- Bring your pet to visit a senior citizen or disabled person (make sure beforehand that the person has no animal allergies and that this is allowed in the facility or home!)
- Always ask for permission from a handicapped person before you start helping them. Don’t assume that they need help.
- Look through photo albums, play a board game or do a jigsaw puzzle with an elderly or handicapped person during your visit with them.
- Remember that patience is a virtue! Although it can be quite difficult to spend time with a person (especially if he/she has Alzheimer’s or another cognitive disease), it is important to be kind and compassionate towards these people.
- Consider volunteering at a nursing home or helping a family from your church with their handicapped child.
- Teach someone who is homebound how to knit, sew or crochet.
- Record or film an elderly friend or family member reminiscing about his or her life. This will turn into a wonderful memento for the person’s family!