

Exploring the Catholic Virtue of Love

Overview: Students will explore the Catholic virtue of love in the novel *To Hope and Back*, focusing on themes of compassion, selflessness, and kindness toward others. Students will read passages from the book, engage in discussions, and participate in activities that encourage them to live out this virtue in their own lives. Students will embark on a self-reflective faith journey and they create a vision board. Through this process, they will explore love in its various forms—love for self, love within culture, and love for God’s creation—deepening their understanding and connection to each of these aspects.

1. Introduction to the Catholic Virtue of Love: Activate the learning by engaging students in reflective conversations, Catholic mindfulness and a deeper understanding of the virtue.

Discussion Prompt: What does "love" mean to you? What are some ways people show love in their everyday lives? Can you think of a time when you showed love to someone, or when someone showed love to you?

Scripture Reference: Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, where Paul describes love as patient, kind, and selfless. Discuss how this passage relates to the virtue of love.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails ...”

Define Love: Love is the selfless, unconditional care and concern for others, shown through actions, words, and attitudes. It is about putting others before ourselves and seeking the well-being of others, as Jesus taught.

2. Exploring Love in *To Hope and Back*: Explore the passage below reflecting on the Catholic virtue of love. Use the discussion questions to spark conversation.

“I am not sad to leave these soldiers far behind me. It is leaving home, probably forever, that makes me sad. I am afraid I will never see our beautiful apartment on Elisabeth Strasse again. Two days ago when I looked out the window of our flat on the fourth floor, I realized that this would be the last time I would see the trolley cars rumble up Tenk Strasse, with men, women, and children hanging off the steps and out the windows. This would be the last time for me to

watch the people rushing by on their way to work, and my last chance to look right across the street to where my grandmother, my Oma Ida, has been living in her apartment for as long as I can remember.” (p. 5)

“Mutti had said over and over that we were going to a place where we would be safe and free. There would be no gangs waiting to beat up Jewish kids. There would be no park benches where I was forbidden to sit. But all I could think about was that I didn't want to leave without my Papa. How could this freedom be worth it, if we were not going to be together? You won't believe this, but late that night came another sudden knock at the door. I could hear my Mutti shrieking. I ran to her. Was it the Gestapo again? But Mutti's face was lit up as if she knew that knock and knew who was waiting behind the door. She opened it... and there was Papa! ” (p.22-24)

“Sometimes my grandmother is so strict, like when she used to cook for us, and nothing was allowed to remain on our plates. She's never been one to kiss and hug me, but I can tell that she loves me, anyway. Now I can see she is worried, but this time, her commands are no help. I am still feeling queasy. My head is pounding, and my stomach is lurching. ‘Make it stop, Oma’ I plead. ‘I think I am going to be sick.’ ‘Come and eat something.’ she urges.” (p.45)

Discussion Questions:

- How do these passages demonstrate the virtue of love?
- Why is love important in the context of this story?
- How does love help the characters in the book face adversity and challenges?
- How does the virtue of love weave throughout each primary character's story? (ex., Captain Schroeder, Lisa, Sol)
- How is love represented and/or demonstrated by secondary characters? (ex. Paula, Mrs. Roosevelt)

3. Engaging with Love: Students engage in a reflective activity that explores the virtue of love.

Ask the students to reflect and discuss how love of self, love of culture, and love of God's creation guide us in our journey of faith formation. Use the reflection questions below to guide the discussion and reflection.

Love of Self: *How can we show love to ourselves? What does it mean to care for our own well-being, to be kind to ourselves, and to believe in our own worth? How can loving yourself help you love others and the world around you?*

Love of Culture: *How does loving and respecting our own culture, as well as the cultures of others, help us build stronger communities? What can we learn from the traditions and*

experiences of those around us? How can respecting your own culture help you understand and appreciate other cultures?

Love of God's Creation: *What does it mean to love the world and everything God has made? How can we show love for Mother Earth in our everyday actions? What is one small action you can take this week to show love for God's creation?*

Invite students to create a vision board that reflects your faith journey and shows how you experience love in three important areas: love of self, love of culture, and love of God's creation. Invite the students to think about your journey of faith. This could include how they see themselves, their relationship with their culture and heritage, and their connection to God's creation (the world around you, nature, and all living things).

Instructions for Students:

Find images, symbols, and/or words for each category:

- **Love of Self:** Find or create images that remind you of what you love about yourself. This could be things like your strengths, talents, and qualities that make you unique. Think about how God made you special and worthy of love.
- **Love of Culture:** Include images, symbols, or words that represent your cultural background, traditions, and community. What aspects of your culture make you proud? How does your culture shape your faith journey?
- **Love of God's Creation:** Add pictures or drawings that show your appreciation for nature, animals, the Earth, and all the beauty in God's creation. This could be a tree, a sunset, a family, or anything in nature that you feel connected to.

Design Your Vision Board: Create three sections on your vision board (one for each area: love of self, love of culture, and love of God's creation), or arrange your images in any way that feels meaningful to you. Use colors, words, and other elements to express how each area makes you feel loved and connected to God's plan for you.

Reflection: Once your vision board is complete, write a short reflection (around 1-2 paragraphs) on the following: How do you show love for yourself, your culture, and God's creation? Why is it important to have these loves in your life as part of your faith journey?

Share: Be ready to share your vision board and reflection with the class. You can explain one image or section from your board and why it's meaningful to you.

4. Connecting Love to Real-World Action: Students apply their knowledge of the virtue of love and make connections to themselves, others and the world.

Divide students into small groups and give them different scenarios (e.g., helping a friend who is feeling sad, caring for a pet, standing up for someone who is being bullied). Each group will create a short skit showing how love is demonstrated in that situation. After each skit, discuss with the class the ways in which love was shown and how it made a difference.

5. Consolidating and Celebrating our Learning: Students are invited to consolidate their learning and celebrate their new knowledge.

Reflection: In analyzing the Catholic virtue of love through *To Hope and Back*, we've explored how love can be a powerful force that helps us face hardship and transforms the lives of others. Engage students in a Faith Journey Quote Walk: Love of Self, Culture, and God's Creation. Invite the students to walk through a series of powerful quotes that encourage you to reflect on their faith journey. As the students walk, encourage them to think about how each quote connects to the themes of **love of self**, **love of culture**, and **love of God's creation**.

Set up the Walk: Use the suggested quotes below or select your own quotes related to the virtue of love. Post each quote around the room or outdoor area where students will walk. Leave enough space between each quote so that students can pause and reflect on each one. Consider printing the quotes on large sheets of paper or making them colorful to catch students' attention.

Walk and Reflect: As the students walk to each quote, encourage them to stop and take a moment to read it carefully. Invite them to think about how it connects to one of the three important areas: love of self, love of culture, or love of God's creation. After reading each quote, ask students to reflect on how the quote applies to their own faith journey.

Suggested Quotes:

"Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." — Martin Luther King Jr.

"It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving." — Blessed Mother Teresa

"Love is not about how much you say 'I love you,' but how much you prove that it's true." — Unknown

"Love is the only reality, and it is not a mere sentiment. It is the ultimate truth at the heart of creation." — Rabindranath Tagore

Post-Walk Reflection: After completing the walk, students take time to reflect and journal about the experience or discuss it in a sharing circle. Questions to consider:

- Which quote resonated with you the most? Why?
 - How do the three areas of love (love of self, love of culture, and love of God's creation) come together in your faith journey?
 - What actions will you take this week to show love for yourself, your culture, and God's creation?
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6. Closing Prayer: Rejoice in the virtue of love by coming together in prayer.

Dear God,

Thank You for showing us Your great love, which is always patient, kind, and forgiving. Help us to share that same love with others, especially those who need it the most. May we open our hearts to those around us, offer kindness, and show selfless care in all our actions. Let love be the guiding force in everything we do.

Amen.