

JANUARY MONTHLY THEME:  
LEGACY—LIFE AFTER DEATH

As one year begins and another ends, the reminder of passing time can provoke reflection about the meaning, purpose, and direction of one's life. What will we leave behind when we are gone? What impact have we made upon the world? Do we want to act differently or pursue something specifically with our days? And, what does happen to us when we die? While not always in the foreground of our living, questions of legacy and what happens after our death can shape how we live in the here and now. Religions and cultures have offered different visions and values for what happens after we die and what defines a good legacy. Our theme this month explores our own understandings of legacy and how this might impact our living.

**Which question is calling to you? Where is it leading you?**

1. How will you be remembered? What values? Attributes? Mistakes? Successes?
2. What stories of you and your life do you hope will continue to be told?
3. What images or objects do you hold on to because they symbolize a legacy received and/or one you would like to pass on?
4. In what ways has your life been shaped by the legacies of others?
5. What legacies shape our shared world in positive or negative ways? What, if any, is our responsibility to change or continue these legacies?
6. What do you believe happens to a person after death? What do you hope happens?
7. In what ways does your belief about the nature of an afterlife impact your choices in how you live?

**Wise Words:**

You have no idea what your legacy will be because your legacy is every life you touch.

*Maya Angelou*

Humanity's legacy of stories and storytelling is the most precious we have. All wisdom is in our stories and songs. A story is how we construct our experiences. At the very simplest, it can be: 'He/she was born, lived, died.' Probably that is the template of our stories - a beginning, middle, and end. This structure is in our minds.

*Doris Lessing*

What will remain of us is love.

*Philip Larkin*

It's never a question of skin pigmentation. It's never a question of just culture or sexual orientation or civilization. It's what kind of human being you're going to choose to be from your mama's womb to the tomb and what kind of legacy will you leave.

*Cornel West*

One of the things we tell ourselves as African-Americans is if we work hard, play by the rules, we do start back a little ways, but if we can be twice as good, somehow we can escape history and heritage and legacy.

*Ta-Nehisi Coates*

Until the legacy of remembered and reenacted trauma is taken seriously, black America cannot heal.

*bell hooks*

People who think you could wave a magic wand and the legacy of the past will be over are blind.

*Ruth Bader Ginsburg*

I feel that my father's greatest legacy was the people he inspired to get involved in public service and their communities, to join the Peace Corps, to go into space. And really that generation transformed this country in civil rights, social justice, the economy and everything.

*Caroline Kennedy*

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

*William James*

The planting of a tree, especially one of the long-living hardwood trees, is a gift which you can make to posterity at almost no cost and with almost no trouble, and if the tree takes root it will far outlive the visible effect of any of your other actions, good or evil.

*George Orwell*

There is no escape—we pay for the violence of our ancestors.

*Frank Herbert, Dune*

What is my job on the planet? What is it that needs doing, that I know something about, that probably won't happen unless I take responsibility for it?

*Buckminster Fuller (UU)*

No legacy is so rich as honesty.

*William Shakespeare*

"Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there.

It doesn't matter what you do, he said, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away. The difference between the man who just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching, he said. The lawn-cutter might just as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime."

*Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451*

#### **Resources:**

- ["7 Ways to Capture the Wealth of Family Stories,"](#) by Bill High
- [UUA Resources on Legacy](#)

#### **Books**

- *The Stories We Leave Behind: A Legacy-Based Approach to...Stuff,* Laura H. Gilbert
- *How to Write a Memoir in 30 Days,* Roberta Temes, PhD
- *Life After Death: A Study of the Afterlife in World Religions,* Farnáz Ma'súmián
- *History Teaches Us to Resist,* Mary Frances Berry

#### **Books for Kids**

- *My Mother's Pearls* by Catherine Myler Fruisen
- *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney
- *The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flourney

#### **Video**

- [Molly of Denalie](#) Grandpa's Drum