

# Education

There are two parts to Education

1. Education: Early Experience
2. Education: Philosophy of Education and More Recent Education

Facilitator's Directions

Materials needed

Letter #728: Mother Theresa on American Children, Dec. 22, 1847.

Letter #10: Mother Caroline on American Children, June 18, 1850.

Audio from Willa Cather's, *My Antonia*

Guided Imagery on Remembering our School Days

Before distributing the letters the FACILITATOR says:

“I'd like to welcome you to this discussion on Education as experienced by School Sisters of Notre Dame. We'll be using primary source material from a variety of sources.

However, all of us have educational experiences to remember.

“Let's take a few moments to remember OUR school days... Take a few deep breaths, relax and close your eyes. In your imagination, walk down the street toward your elementary school. Can you see other students heading the same direction, carrying books, or calling your name?

Can you remember walking into school and noting that peculiar smell of chalk dust, body odors and Mr. Clean? Try to focus on what it was/is like to sit in your desk and be recognized by a teacher who checks the absentee list...

Taking your entire elementary education as a whole, is there any particular event that stands out for you today?

An activity you enjoyed... a teacher who challenged you to grow...  
a bully who made life miserable... a clique that excluded you...

Or do you remember feeling that you were actually learning ...  
or the victory in learning how to read...

Savor some of those moments (pause)

Now let's consciously hear the final bell at the end of the school day, gather our belongings, and gradually return to this time and place.

The FACILITATOR continues: What was that experience like for you? Take a few minutes and share with the person next to you some memories that came to mind.

After a few minutes, invite the members of the group to share with one another.

FACILITATOR: As we briefly remembered our own school days, I'd like to go back in time and share how the German foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Mother Theresa, experienced education. She wrote this letter shortly after her arrival in the United States in 1847. It was sent to Fr. Siegert, her lifelong friend. He was also the spiritual director of the community in Munich. It is dated Dec. 22, 1847 from Baltimore. This was just 5 months after the arrival of the first six SSNDs in the U.S. (DISTRIBUTE letter of Mother Theresa. *The North American Foundation*, edited by S. Hester Valentine, SSND, pp. 75-76, 1977.)

FACILITATOR: I suggest that one or two people read the letter aloud, while the others in the group follow along silently. When you are finished reading, discuss the questions following the reading.

Does anything sound familiar? Could any of this be said of today's children/students?

What does it tell you about these first American children?

What would it take to be a successful teacher in America?

Do you think you would have enjoyed teaching in such a situation?

Anything else you'd like to say?

**For elementary students:**

- ❖ If discussing with students or elementary age children, consider inviting them to write an essay on one episode in their own educational experience. This could include:
  - ❖ A special memory of sports or competition in class,
  - ❖ A teacher whom they especially liked,
  - ❖ An activity they did with friends as part of a class project,
  - ❖ How they would describe their class if they were the teacher
  - ❖ Or a description of what it's like to come to their school each day.
  - ❖ Encourage them to give vivid details as Mother Theresa did in her letter of 1847. What would someone say reading it 10 years from now?

If you have time consider taking the second letter.

FACILITATOR distributes letter of Mother Caroline and says: Mother Caroline wrote this second letter. She was the American foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame and came to America when she was just twenty-three. She was writing of her experience with children in New York, in 1848, just one year after she and Mother Theresa arrived in the U.S. (*The Letters of Mother Caroline Friess*, ed. by Barbara Brumleve, SSND, pp. 44-45, 53-56, 1991.)

FACILITATOR continues: Listen as one or two people read the letter aloud. Remember this is a primary source expressing a woman's experience of teaching in the U.S. (if appropriate note how rare it is to hear history from a woman's perspective: discuss reasons for this.)

1. Do you find anything that makes you smile as you read this letter?
2. What made "needlework" so important?
3. Don't miss the footnote: what does it tell you about the School Sisters of Notre Dame?
4. Anything else you'd like to say

FACILITATOR: I hope you've gained a new appreciation of life in an American school in the 1800s

Do you know someone for whom English is a second language? What are some challenges s/he faces? Are any of you able to speak more than one language?

What is the relation between education and personal fulfillment?

Is there a teacher who has made a difference in your life?

Has a pet been a teacher to you?

The FACILITATOR continues: One School Sister of Notre Dame (Frances Padberg) was asked this question:

"What is the most dangerous thing you ever did?" With great conviction, she responded, "Learn to read." Take a few minutes of quiet and think of her answer. What difference would it make if you could not read...(pause) What difference would it make if you had to rely on someone else to tell you what to believe?

Any thoughts? (invite comments)

FACILITATOR continues: Why do you think education for girls has been especially difficult in some countries/families? (consider what it would be like in “your” family, if only the boys could read? Boys in class need to respond as well as girls)

NB. Today almost 2 billion persons cannot read or write; 2/3 of them are female. (data from the United Nations)

FACILITATOR concludes: If there are no other comments let’s conclude this first part of our topic with a short prayer.

O God, Friend of Children, (Kinderfreund)

Blessed Mother Theresa and Mother Caroline had quite a challenge. Their love for you and the children gave them strength. Make us grateful for those who have taught us how to learn. Bless them abundantly. Help us do the same for others, whether they are our own children, grandchildren or children of the global village. And teach us to be lifelong learners, always curious and eager to learn. (pause) Let’s name those persons out loud for whom we’re grateful: perhaps you would like to name a teacher from school or your family... (Pause) May those we’ve named and those deep in our hearts be blessed this day for their goodness to us. We ask this in Jesus’ name. (use a title that is religiously sensitive to your audience) Amen

Note to Facilitator: Please adapt this to your audience in ways that enhance the self-esteem of each participant. Hopefully, this interactive process will invite comments that will lead to understanding. And it may even lead some in the group to consider a career in education.

## 2. Education

There are two parts to Education.

Facilitator’s Directions

Materials needed:

Theresa’s Holy Work of Education

Convent Fire #369

Statistics on School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1966 and 2001

Some Websites of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

The FACILITATOR says:

Welcome to a discussion of education and the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the recent past.

Thinking of your own education what was the philosophy of education motivating your teachers? Remember a philosophy refers to the educational goals of a particular way of teaching.

1. Is there anyone in the group who is a teacher today? Or has been a teacher? What was important to you as an educator?
2. Were any of you taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame?
3. If so, how would you describe their philosophy of education?

Desire to educate the whole child, body, mind, spirit.

Desire to build community within the school.

Desire to build unity within the parish and the broader community.

Tough standards with limited praise: always challenged to grow.

The FACILITATOR distributes Theresa' Holy Work of Education. Take a few moments and study some aspects of the educational philosophy of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. (Invite participants to read each excerpt)

(In her comments about children falling easily, she is writing because a bricklayer laid the floor of a kindergarten unevenly. She was very upset and her advocacy for children is seen in these comments.)

4. Is there any aspect of Mother Theresa's educational philosophy that means something to you?
5. How would you describe the curriculum listed? Remember this is 1839.

The FACILITATOR distributes Letter #369, Convent Fire. (Insert Fac. Directions here)

The FACILITATOR shares Statistics of 1966 and the Graph of Ministries saying: Now we'll look at a more current understanding of the educational ministry of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The Holy Rule suggests a broader understanding of education rather than limiting education to classroom teaching only. In #22 of *You Are Sent*, we read, "Urged by the love of Christ, we choose to express our mission through ministry directed toward education. For us, education means enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God's image and assisting them to direct their gifts toward building the earth. Like Mother Theresa, we educate with the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons. Thus, our ministry demands a Christian vision of what the human person is called to be and what the world is destined to become."

The FACILITATOR continues: As we look at the Statistics of 1966, there is a considerable difference in the number of sisters in education than in the Graph of Ministries prepared for a General Chapter of 2001. Let's look carefully at both and discuss the differences.

NB. In 1966, there was no recorded data regarding any School Sisters of Notre Dame being retired even though we have always had elderly sisters unable to participate in active ministry. The categories in 1966 are primarily related to classroom education.

The FACILITATOR asks: What significant events had an impact on the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the 1960s? Vatican II, Vietnam War, Death of President Kennedy, Dr. King's death, Bobby Kennedy's death, the emergence of feminism, educational opportunities of women, especially School Sisters of Notre Dame, etc.

NB. An additional resource which the Facilitator may find helpful here is entitled *The Dark Night in Religious Life, 1962-1990*.

The FACILITATOR notes the context of change between 1966 and the present and says: School Sisters of Notre Dame throughout the congregation/world were experiencing similar changes, depending on their historical situations. i.e. Cold War, Communism, etc. Notice the Graph of Ministries, 2001. The expanded understanding led School Sisters of Notre Dame to enter into new fields of service. Consider asking a School Sisters of Notre Dame you know to share how her life changed from her entrance and early education to her present ministry. (If possible invite these comments from participants.)

The FACILITATOR distributes Websites and says: This list of some Websites of the School Sisters of Notre Dame gives an idea of the educational mission in which School Sisters are involved today. Please check them out, especially some of the international sites mentioned.

Conclude by praying #22, given above. #23 and #24 of *You Are Sent* are given below. The FACILITATOR concludes by saying:

In looking at the changes within society and their impact on the ministry of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in North America and beyond we see the lived reality of the following quotation from the Holy Rule. We read:

“We are educators in all that we are and do. We continually choose ways of living and serving that call to growth. Responding to varying needs, we engage in a diversity of ministries, specific services through which we work for the enablement of persons.

Deep faith and high courage urged Mother Theresa to risk already meager resources to satisfy needs wherever she was called. In her spirit we respond to God's call expressed in our times. Like her, we educate in schools and in other areas of urgent need; like her,

we exclude no one from our concern, but are especially sensitive to youth and women and are impelled to prefer the poor.”

May all School Sisters of Notre Dame be supported in this mission, especially as they join with others who are inspired by similar values. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen