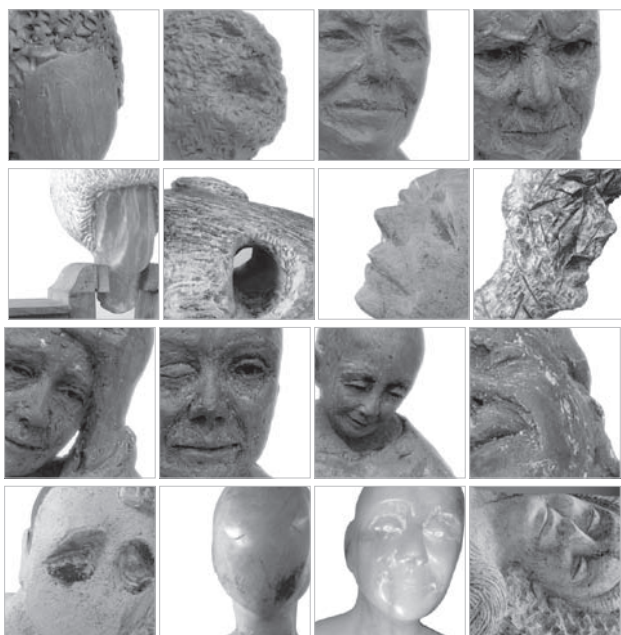


Contents

- 2 Introduction: exploring how to deal positively with change and loss
- 3 Dealing with loss
- 4 Shaping feelings: Jean Parker explains the making process
- 5 Creative activities for individual small groups
- 14 Life, death and beyond: perspectives from six religions and Humanism
- 16 Activities for the secondary classroom



Westhill Endowment

Westhill Endowment is a grant-giving charity whose objectives are:

The promotion of education in the manner which reflects the principles of the Christian religion and the tradition of the historic free churches and the promotion of dialogue and educational interchange between the Christian Church and persons of other living faiths.

To achieve these objectives Westhill supports community-transforming projects with advice and grants.

Gifts in kind

The charity can make available Jean Parker's alabaster sculptures and supporting material on a free loan basis for exhibition in appropriate venues. Further details are available on the website.

Resin copies of the terracottas

The charity can arrange to cast one or more of the terracottas in bronze resin so that facsimiles are available for handling in art or therapy sessions. Price on application.

Contact information

Westhill Endowment, The Lodge Westhill, South Drive, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6WE

Phone: 0121 472 8000

Fax: 0121 415 8453

E-mail: info@westhillendowment.org

Website: www.westhillendowment.org

Introduction:

Exploring how to deal positively with change and loss

This teaching and learning pack explores a series of eight sculptures made by Jean Parker which deal with personal loss and the grief process.

You are invited to explore alongside Jean how she processed great loss and grief in her own life. The material provides an innovative and insightful way into why life is sometimes very hard and how to find a way through loss and grief to some kind of reconciliation and a more peaceful situation.

Jean worked towards resolution of her feelings by moving through eight phases of emotion each expressed in a bold sculptural statement. Accompanying Jean on that journey might rehearse for those who use this pack how to be with someone else enduring those sorts of unexpected stresses. You may have reason to work through this transformatory process for yourself.

* * * * *

The pack might be used by a facilitator in a wide range of situations, including one-to-one counselling work, small-group discussion, bereavement workshops and with school students, for example in Religious Education, Personal, Social and Health Education, or the Creative Arts. It contains:

- **A CD-ROM.** This includes: a 25-minute video of Jean; a digital sequence of the alabaster and terracotta sculptures; three sets of eight documents (pdfs) presenting quotations from Jean about each sculpture, stories from a variety of religious traditions or ethical views, and reference materials for the facilitator; two photocopiable worksheets (pdfs).

In the video, Jean clearly sets the sculptures in the context of her own life experiences. It is recommended that facilitators watch the video at an early stage. Individuals working with the material may well want to respond first to particular sculptures and only when they have experienced the artworks at first hand choose to view Jean's own rationalisation of them.

- **Large format picture cards (8).** There is one card for each of the final alabaster sculptures. On the back of each picture, there are questions for discussion and a story from a religious tradition or world view reflecting on the emotion expressed in the sculpture. (The stories on the cards are also included as pdfs on the CD-ROM.)
- **Postcards (8).** There is one card for each of the original terracotta maquettes made by Jean on retreat.
- **Facilitator's book.** This 24-page book includes introductory material and activity ideas for using the stimulus with groups and individuals. Further such material is available on the CD-ROM.

* * * * *

It has been a privilege to work with these raw and powerful statements moving from despair to hope. I thank Jean Parker for expressing her feelings in this revelatory way. Thanks, too, to the Westhill Endowment for their generous sponsorship of the **Bald Statements** resource pack.

Peter Fishpool

When death comes nearby, whatever our background, we are often surprised by it and have to work hard to bring our coping mechanisms into play.

Dealing with loss

The eight heads in this series by Jean Parker illustrate Jean's own rationalisation of how she worked through stages of powerful emotion in response to her cancer and other losses that affected her in that period. These eight stages are Jean's particular way of describing the progression of feelings. Other people have and will describe them in other ways. Not everyone will experience them so distinctly or necessarily in exactly the same sequence.

Jean's artworks provide a remarkable opportunity for looking inside those feelings of loss. They provide holding forms by which others can begin to talk over difficult emotions and give definition to the different stages of processing their own losses. It is important for each of us to develop emotional literacy in relation to loss and change.

Many of us will be affected by road deaths or other tragic accidents, terminal illness and death; by marriage break-up and divorce; by separation, including by emigration and moving to obtain work. People may experience other, less final, losses but with just as intense emotions, such as those associated with major illness, addiction, reconstituted families, and so on. Sometimes the people not apparently at the centre of these changes, such as the children of separating parents, are severely affected. Sucked in through no fault of their own, they flail about emotionally, feeling themselves the victims of unasked-for change.

By creating safe spaces and metaphors with which we can explore some of these emotions we begin to rehearse for life. All of us will in due course have to deal with the loss of loved ones.

As we progress through life, all of us will move through phases where the thrill of the new may be muffled by regret for what has passed and is no longer available. For our own well-being it is important that we acknowledge the possibility of these changes and the effects of them on those around us.

Although it is possible to analyse separate phases in how people deal with catastrophic change, each person will feel things in their own way and express their emotions (if at all) differently. In considering Jean Parker's expressions of

dealing with loss through cancer, what we can hope for in one another is an enhanced ability for empathy even with people from a background very different to our own.

In making bald statements of her own grieving process, Jean has provided an avenue for understanding through which we can begin to climb into another's shoes.

Jean Parker refers to the medical staff, counsellors, family, friends and retreat-house staff who helped her along her journey. By exploring Jean's story we might begin to see where each one of us could be a useful support or prompt to others forced onto such a savage journey.

Even if we cannot give practical or emotional help ourselves, understanding the roots of the trauma in someone else's life will enable us to understand better why that person is having such a difficult time. It may help us renegotiate working arrangements for that person so that they and those around them can better manage their situation.

Having an insight into the highs and lows of another's personal experience should help us to appreciate the need to negotiate relationships. Our choices in playing out a relationship each have consequences. Sometimes we might need to make compromises to achieve a way of being with someone else that is as positive and productive for them as it is for us, even if their circumstances are very different from ours.

Each of us will one day die. Young women, because of their menstrual cycle and potentiality for motherhood, seem better able to comprehend this. Young men usually have to be taught about death – it is a part of most aboriginal male initiation rites, but there is seemingly nothing comparable in contemporary western culture.

When death comes nearby, whatever our background, we are often surprised by it and have to work hard to bring our coping mechanisms into play. This pack offers users the opportunity of preparing for the challenge of catastrophic changes in family, friends and in the work situation, the cause of which may have been entirely unforeseen.

As we progress through life, all of us will move through phases where the thrill of the new may be muffled by regret for what has passed and is no longer available.

Creative activities

for individuals and small groups

- 1 Drama activity:
Masks
- 2 Clay modelling activity:
Emotion
- 3 Art activity (collage):
Questioning
- 4 Dance activity:
Anger
- 5 Creative writing activity:
Depression
- 6 Individual art activity:
Acceptance
- 7 ICT activity:
Healing
- 8 Music activity:
Peace
- 9 Final activity:
End piece?

The images which are at the heart of this pack have the potential to be used in a wide variety of contexts, with individuals and small groups.

The activities suggested here provide some 'ways in' to working with the images to develop understanding of Jean's work and the impact her life experiences had on her. They also provide an opportunity for personal reflection for individuals or groups.

The images, whether used singly or in combination, have the capacity to release powerful emotions in those working with them. Group leaders will know the personal and emotional needs of those they are working with, and will decide accordingly whether or not this pack is an appropriate resource. They should also remain alert to the impact on individual members of the group, and aim to provide a follow-up face-to-face opportunity for them to talk, either as a group or individually, about their feelings about the images themselves and feelings generated by working with the images.

Aim to provide an opportunity for personal reflection for individuals or groups working with them

1 Drama activity: Masks

Show how frightened the person in denial is and how they respond to the character trying to help.



Denial in terracotta by Jean Parker

1. Ask group members, in pairs, to:
 - take turns at putting on a mask representing an emotion which your partner then has to mimic;
 - extend this by taking turns to put on body language representing a different emotion for your partner to mimic;
 - create a short dialogue in which what is said out loud is completely contradicted by the expression worn on the characters' faces.
2. Ask the group to 'thought shower' situations in which people 'put on a brave face', when confronted by stress, illness or tragedy. What situations are identified – and how do individuals respond?
3. Invite the group to devise a scene starting with the central character stuck in a particular emotion denying a problem. Another character tries to help them recognise what they are denying.

The scene will need to show how frightened the person in denial is and how they respond to the character trying to help. At what level is the frightened person aware they are 'blocked' within a particular emotion?

How intelligent is the helper in attempting to read, understand and respond to feelings? Start and end with a freeze-frame representing how the central character is reacting to the problem.

2 Clay modelling activity: Emotion

Talk together about the effects being achieved before returning with fresh insights for your own work.



Disbelief in terracotta by Jean Parker

1. Show the group the set of images of the terracotta heads, and discuss together:
 - What is the effect of exaggerating or minimising particular features (e.g. the eyes, the mouth, the nose, the ears)?
 - What is the effect of using particular textures (e.g. in **Disbelief**, **Anger** and **Healing**)?
2. Ask the group to centre down into quiet and take a minute to consider what emotion they would like to express in a clay head.

Ask them to imagine in their mind's eye what the head might look like. What might be exaggerated? What features might be played down or even disappear? What might be textured? If the head has hair, how will that be portrayed? It is often the eyes, however simply executed, that give life to a head – will the eyes just be the pit of the iris of an eye or something more?

3. Ask the group to model their heads. Tell them how long you will be able to allow them to work before clearing up. Warn them about three quarters of the way through the modelling session that they should now be getting to their finishing point.

If you have lots of time, you may be able to stop the work once or twice so that the group can look at their colleagues' work, and perhaps talk together about the effects being achieved before returning with fresh insights to their own work. Do leave plenty of time for clearing up.

4. You may want to conclude the session with individual writing or reflection time or circle-time sharing. Here the group could review the experience of working with the clay or of concentrating on one particular emotion.