

# The Value of Human Life



Catholic Cemeteries  
Archdiocese of Vancouver

## Purpose:

To stimulate student interest in the value and dignity of the human person.

## Lesson Focus:

*It is intended that students will...*

- Develop an interest and curiosity in the value of human life.
- Critically engage with different worldviews pertaining to human dignity.

Lesson Plan		Duration: 60 minutes
<b>Introduction</b> (10 min)	<b>Small group discussions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Is human life more valuable than plant or animal life? Why or why not?</i></li> <li>➤ <i>What sets humanity apart from the rest of the visible world?</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Guided Learning Steps</b> (40 min)	In small groups, guide students through the following process, designed to generate good questions and stimulate critical thinking: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Write down as many questions as you can, regarding the following topic: <i>Human Dignity</i>. (5 min) Rule: they must write down all questions spoken in their small group without tweaking or re-wording them.</li> <li>2. Re-word all close-ended questions such that they read as open-ended questions (see Teacher's Guide).</li> <li>3. Re-visit your list of questions again: as a small group, decide upon the three that are most important to you. (5 min)</li> </ol> <b>Class discussion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Focus on student input, don't worry yet about making sure they have "the right answers." The goal is to get students to begin to grapple with and think about human life and dignity. (30 min)</li> </ul>	
<b>Closure</b> (10 min)	<b>Journal Question:</b> <i>What is the meaning of human life, in your opinion? Do you think there's life after death? What might that look like?</i>	

### Materials (provided at [rccav.org/educators](http://rccav.org/educators))

1. Student journals

### Connections to CISVA Prescribed Learning Outcomes

- Examine contemporary dilemmas that compromise the Dignity of the Human Person. (E2)
- Develop a response to contemporary dilemmas that compromise the dignity of the human person and defend why the Church's teaching are the most humanizing. (E3)
- Contrast the position of Catholic Anthropology with contradictory anthropologies. (B4)

# Teacher's Guide



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## Introduction

### Small Groups

Consider creating small groups in advance. It is beneficial for students to have meaningful discussion in small groups throughout the year, but bad habits may form in a group that has developed a “routine.” Changing small groups every month, such that by the end of the year each student has seen as many different faces in the class as possible, is a good way to keep small group discussion a fresh and worthwhile activity.

## Guided Learning Steps

### Open-ended vs. close-ended questions:

A close-ended question typically can be answered by a simple “yes” or “no,” which is a precise and direct method of getting an answer. For the sake of small group or whole class discussion, however, open-ended questions usually require more thought and therefore yield more immersive conversations. This method of generating open-ended questions is conducive to fostering critical thinking.

### How to facilitate whole class discussion effectively:

Every class is different! The vast combination of different personalities in a classroom ensures that the discussion dynamic in any two classes is never quite the same. Here are some helpful tools to give life to a struggling discussion:

- **“Share with the person next to you.”**  
In a shy group, it is helpful to say this after posing the question to the whole group. This allows students the opportunity to bounce their thoughts off of someone before risking expressing their opinion to the whole class, which can be intimidating. Also, this gives the more reserved students the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the discussion.
- **A safe environment**  
Students need to know that their opinion, whatever that may be, is respected. Remind them that expressing a different opinion will not result in a lower grade or a verbal reprimand, even if it’s contrary to Church teaching. If a student feels safe expressing their opinion, it also opens their minds to hearing others’ opinions.
- **Facilitator vs. Lecturer**  
There is a time and place for lectures, but it is not during class discussion. Expressing “the answer” is not the purpose here. Getting students interested in the topic and forcing them to critically think about it, is the purpose. A teacher’s primary role during whole class discussion, therefore, should be to facilitate. Sometimes this means calling on specific students for their input; sometimes it means summarizing what another student has said and posing a follow up question; sometimes it means playing devil’s advocate; but rarely does it mean giving your own opinion, unless directly asked for by the students.
- **Validate student input**  
Listen well, and respond to a student’s input in a way that demonstrates that you’ve heard and understood the comment. Rewording or recapping what a student has said; asking for clarification on a detail in the comment; and asking follow-up questions are practical ways you can validate student input.

# Closure:

## Journaling

Doing journals in class can be an effective quiet time for students to decompress and gain perspective on their life. It is difficult to do this, however, unless the environment changes. Things like lighting a candle and playing contemplative music, or making a class visit to the school chapel, can make a huge difference in making this time valuable for students.

## Ideas for Extension and Extra Resources:

- **Website resource: Catholic teaching on the dignity of the human person:**  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (usccb.org)  
<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/life-and-dignity-of-the-human-person.cfm>
- **Research Project:** Have students research what other major world religions teach about the afterlife. What similarities and differences do they have with Catholicism?  
CISVA learning outcome: **B4** *Contrast the position of Catholic anthropology with contradictory anthropologies*