



Last Words: Reflections on My Life

Overview: The purpose of the “Last Words” activity is to challenge participants to think, with intentionality, about what they want to accomplish during their lifetime. While there is much emphasis on looking forward and imagining our futures, this activity engages participants in a more reflective process. They are asked to travel into their last years and look back upon the life they have lived. What will they have done with their years here on earth. How will they be remembered? In addition, participants are given an opportunity to reflect upon the concept of legacy and to consider their personal legacy.

Category: Visioning, Personal Development, Perspective Taking

Bonner Recommended Sequence: This activity is especially appropriate for seniors, but can be done with students during their junior year. This is an excellent follow-up to the “Tuesdays with Morrie” exercise.

expectation	explore	experience	example	expertise
			♥	♥

VALUES: ALL - community engagement, community building, diversity, social justice, international perspective, spiritual reflection

Level: This activity is most effective with individuals in the example and expertise stage as they have will have a broader world and personal view.

Type: This is a structured activity suitable for use in a workshop, retreat or training session. It can also be used during a regular meeting or on an individual basis with reflective discussion occurring during a one-on-one meeting.

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Provoke participants to consider, from a “Big Picture” perspective, what they want their lives to look like at the end of their journey.
- Challenge individuals to think about the specifics of their life’s vision. By identifying the parts, they will have a better sense of how to achieve the whole.
- Encourage participants to establish goals that will enable them to accomplish their vision for life.

Materials:

- Pens and/or pencils
- Paper
- “Dead Poet’s Society” video clip
- VCR/DVD

How to Prepare:

Read the activity to become familiar with the exercise. It is important to view the clip from *Dead Poet’s Society* in advance. This will allow you to see how the questions connect with the movie. In addition, you may develop additional questions you feel are appropriate to ask.

Facilitators are also encouraged to work through the activity in advance. Take time to write your own “Last Words” so that you can lead others through that journey.

How to Do/Brief Outline:

The outline has the following four components:

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|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1) Introduce Activity | suggested time 5 minutes or less |
| 2) Watch <i>Dead Poet’s Society</i> clip | suggested time 10 minutes or less |
| 3) Individual Reflection | suggested time 5-10 minutes |
| 4) Sharing | suggested time 15-30 minutes |

Part 1) Introduction

Suggested time: No more than 5 minutes

Say to participants:

At the end of our life’s journey, each of us will leave our legacy. Perhaps one of the greatest images of the concept of legacy occurs in the movie “Dead Poet’s Society. The

students are gathered in front of the school's trophy case and their instructor, in a raspy voice, speaks the infamous words, "Carpe Diem. Seize the day, boys, seize the day." They were prompted to think about the mark that they would leave on one another, their school, and the broader world.

This activity will give us an opportunity to reflect on how we can accomplish that grand task.

Part 2) "Dead Poet's Society"

Suggested time: No more than 10 minutes

View the video clip.

Say:

What thoughts came to mind as you were watching this clip?

What do you think the legacy was for the generations of people who have sat in these chairs and spent time in this room?

What sense of responsibility to future generations does this clip instill?

At this point you may choose to ask one or two more questions that you have developed or you may transition to the next portion of the activity.

Part 3) Individual Reflection

Suggested time: 10 minutes

After viewing and discussing the video clip, transition to the next phase of the activity: individual reflection.

Say:

Like the characters in the movie, it is important for us to think about the mark that we will leave on one another and on the broader world. Looking back on our lives, what will we want to have accomplished? What will our legacy be?

Imagine you have lived a full life and are now near the end of your time here on earth. As you reflect back upon all the days that you have lived, what will your life have been about? How will you be remembered?

Using the questions provided as a guide, please take the next 10 minutes to write your obituary as you would like it to appear in your local paper.

Allow participants time to complete this task.

Part 4) Sharing

Suggested time: 15 – 30 minutes

After participants have had a sufficient amount of time to complete the activity bring them back together for discussion.

Ask:

What made this task easy or difficult for you?

Were you surprised by anything?

Based on what you want to accomplish before you die, how do you need to live your life?

What have you learned about your priorities as a result of this exercise?

Will you make any changes in your life as a result of this activity?

If you have written a personal mission statement, is it congruent with your reflective vision?

If there is a high level of emotional comfort among the participants, ask if one or two individuals would like to share their responses with the group.

Depending on the level of emotional safety individuals feel with the group, you may wish to have them share in a more private setting, such as a one-on-one meeting.

The amount of sharing time will vary based on the size of the group.

Handouts:

Last Words Handout

Last Words

Imagine you have lived a full life and are now near the end of your time here on earth. As you reflect back upon all the days that you have lived, what will your life have been about? How will you be remembered?

Using the following questions to guide you, write your obituary as you would like it to appear in your local paper.

How long will you have lived?

Will you be married? If so, for how long?

How many children will you have?

Where will you live?

How will you have been involved in your local community?

How will you have lived out your faith?

What level of education will you have attained and in what area(s)?

Where will you have worked (education, business, politics, non-profit, medicine, technology...)?

What contributions will you have made to your profession?

To where will you have traveled?

Will you be financially secure?

At what age will you have retired?

How will you have invested your money (real estate, stocks, charities...)?

How will you have spent your leisure time?

What will be your most significant accomplishment?

For what will you be remembered?

