

**“Water for Everyone”**  
a Cooperative Board Game for Children  
about the human right to water, conserving water, and the UUSC  
by Jeanette Ruyle

This game is designed to be one activity within a religious education session or program that focuses on the human right to water and/or other focus areas of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Ideally, this game would accompany other activities, projects, and rituals that would explore the issues, using a variety of modes and methods.

**Learning and experiential objectives for participants**

- Recognize that having access to clean, fresh water is a basic need and is important for all people– a “human right,” in other words.
- Have a basic understanding of what the UUSC is and does as an organization and that the “human right to water” is part of the UUSC’s focus on *environmental justice*. (Note that this is also a focus of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If participants are all older children, this dimension could be further explained.)
- Realize that we as people need to work together to help each other gain and maintain human rights.
- Be reminded that fresh water is a precious resource of the Earth and needs to be protected and conserved.
- Experience playing a game cooperatively and that everyone “wins” in this game.
- Experience discussing and exploring an important issue through play.
- Make a connection between this game and some of our Unitarian Universalist Principles.

**Description of the game**

For 2 - 8 players of multiple ages, about 5 to 11 years old or older, with an adult leader. It is an added benefit (although not necessary) to have mixed ages so that there is a helping exchange between the different ages. In playing the game, children are encouraged to assist each other with the reading of the playing cards, and in discussing the questions.

**Materials**

- A playing piece for each player. These can be made of clay ahead of time, or use buttons, small figures or toys, or bottle caps.
- A die that is marked using stickers or tape so it has only 1 and 2 on its faces, or a coin.
- The game board. This can be made out of a large square of cardboard. (Ours was made from the side of a large appliance box and is 40 inches square. See picture.) A square piece of sturdy fabric could also be used for a “board” with spaces and lines drawn in permanent marker.
  - ▶ The important elements on the board are two concentric circles at the center and several paths leading from the edge of the board to the outer circle.
  - ▶ Each path is made up of 12-14 spaces, each path having the same number of spaces.
- Games cards, printed out and cut apart. A printable table of 20 different cards is provided

- with room to create some of your own.
- Having a poster of the Unitarian Universalist Principles nearby is good to have.

#### To begin

- Leader reviews the basic and simple fact that this is a game of cooperation. Players will need to listen to each other respectfully.
- Each player gets a playing piece and starts on any one of the “start” squares at the edges of the game board.
- Each player will follow their own path toward the center of the board.
- The cards, after being shuffled, are placed in a pile face-down on the board.
- One person begins (could be the youngest, the one with name closest to “w” for water, etc.) and then turns are taken going around to the left.

#### To play

- Roll the specially marked die, or flip a coin for each turn. A player will move 1 or 2 spaces according to the die or coin (heads=1, tails=2)
  - If a player lands on a space with a star, he or she gets to pick up a card.
  - The card is read out loud so everyone can hear. Briefly discuss what it says and/or do what it says; players can help each other or add comments. Follow the card’s directions about making any move (ahead, back, or stay). Players keep the cards they get.
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- NOTE about reading the cards: Anyone who is able to read and wants to read aloud may read a card; the player who picks up a card does not have to be the reader. Depending upon the makeup of the group, the adult leader may decide to be the reader for all cards.
- When players have a move that takes them beyond the last space, they move into the outer part of the central circle but no further.
  - Everyone must reach the outer part of the circle before anyone can go into the center where there is “clean, fresh water for all.”
  - When a player gets to the outer circle, he or she helps the other players. He or she may still draw a card from the pile, and if it is a “move ahead” card, then it is given to the player who is most behind.
  - If all of the cards have been used before everyone is in the outer circle, cards should be gathered from all the players, shuffled, and placed back on the board in a new pile.
  - When all players are in the outer circle, everyone takes their pieces and moves together into the inner circle, calling out “Water for everyone!”
  - Everyone can then have a nice, cool drink of fresh water.

#### Time

The length of time it takes to play the game to the finish varies with the size of the group and how much discussion takes place.

If time is short, the leader and players can decide to play a certain number of rounds— for example, everyone having four turns— and then all move to the center together to end the game. The game also moves more quickly if players take a card with each turn rather than waiting to land on a space with a star.

#### Variations

“Water for Everyone” can be made into a longer activity by having the group...

- Create the playing board and/or the playing pieces before playing the game. While children are making these things (or embellishing them if they are partially made ahead of time), a discussion can be had about the issue of water as a human right. When the game is played, these thoughts and information can be reviewed and reinforced.
- Look at the playing cards after the game and think up new ones to add for a later game. Cards can be decorated and colored as well.

### **A Note to Leaders**

As with all cooperative games, leaders set the tone by modeling cooperative, inclusive, and respectful behavior. This is especially important if you know that some, or perhaps most, children in your group have not experienced cooperative games in the past. You can explicitly state that this is a cooperative game and that means “everyone wins.” If there is room enough, it is helpful for the leader to be one of the players, making it easy to model good game behavior. Depending on the ages, needs, and number of the children, it may be useful to have two adult leaders present.

A major key to this game is the personal interaction that takes place between all the persons involved— children and adults. Sharing one’s thoughts, ideas, and opinions is a lifelong developmental skill, as is listening to others respectfully. The game is meant to facilitate this kind of interchange through brief and hopefully enjoyable moments. Additionally, when information is presented in this way, learning is often enhanced.

Difficulty in reading may be a sensitive issue for some older children and leaders need to be aware of this possibility. If this is known before the game begins, the leader can stipulate that everyone can give their card to the leader to read. The wording on the cards is such that many children 11 years old or younger may need at least a little help with a few of the words, so receiving help with reading should be the norm. All cards are marked with a symbol indicating the basic move for the player, i.e. moving one or two spaces ahead, or back, or staying in place, so every player will be able to figure out the actual move without reading the words.

Many of the cards describe a situation that is imaginary, for example, “Your water supply is shut off...” Children who are at the younger end of the age range, around 5-7 years old, sometimes tend to still think in literal terms. Their first response may be something like, “No it isn’t, we have water.” The leader may need to preface cards like this by saying, “Pretend” or “Imagine” first, or explaining if there is any confusion.

### **Content Resources**

Useful background reading for leaders about the right to water can be found at [http://www.uusc.org/about\\_UUSC](http://www.uusc.org/about_UUSC) and [http://www.uusc.org/content/pepsico\\_new\\_water\\_policy](http://www.uusc.org/content/pepsico_new_water_policy).

There are a number of water-related stories at <http://www.uusc.org/stories/1666>. Use the uusc.org search feature to find the “UUSC fact sheet: Human Right to Water.” Also, there is usually a story about water rights included in the Guest at Your Table Stories of Hope each year.

Some fresh water facts can be found at <http://www.freshwater.org/water-facts.html>