



## *Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan*



*Text:*

from **A New Earth**, by Eckhart Tolle

*Grade/Subject*

Faculty / Adults



*Ideas, Values:*

Enlightenment, Evolution, Beauty, Spirit



*Pre-Seminar Content*



*Launch Activity:*

Introduce this seminar by describing the human need for meaning and connection. Acknowledge that schooling has recently had a greater emphasis on doing and achievement. Invite participants to identify one word to describe the condition of their teacher spirit now.



*Inspectional Read:*

Distribute the text and ask participants to number the paragraphs in the margin--for a total of ten. Read the text the first time through together. Have participants mark any words with which they are unfamiliar.

## Background Information:

Eckhart Tolle (b.1948) is a German-born resident of Canada. He was in academia, but parted from the road less travelled and took a good deal of time to sit and be. He is best known as the author of *The Power of Now* and *A New Earth: Awakening to your Life's Purpose*.

## Vocabulary:

Discuss the meaning of *evocation* and *evolution*, and any other vocabulary participants identify as challenging.

## Analytical Read:

Agree upon time for reading and request that participants take notes while reading a second time. Encourage all to underline 2-3 intriguing phrases and write 1-2 genuine questions.



## Pre-Seminar Process

-  Define and state purpose for Paideia Seminar.
-  Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.
-  Have participants set a Personal Goal.
-  Agree on a Group Goal.

## Seminar Questions

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### *Opening (Identify main ideas from the text.):*

- ❖ What is your favorite phrase or sentence here? (Round robin contributions-- please give paragraph number and read.)
- ❖ Why? (spontaneous discussion; as you are led to speak)

### *Core (Analyze textual details.):*

- ❖ In the second paragraph, what is meant by “the evolution of consciousness”?
- ❖ Based on this text, how would you describe the relationship between Jesus and Buddha?
- ❖ The word *Presence* is capitalized in paragraphs 9 and 10. Why do you think it is capitalized?
- ❖ In paragraph 3, a sentence says flowers “would become like messengers from another realm, like a bridge...” Do you agree or disagree with this idea? Why or why not?

### *Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas.):*

- ❖ What are the notable implications from this text? Why is it important (personally/ professionally) to remember to contemplate beauty?

## Post-Seminar Process



Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal participation goal.

 Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of seminar.

 Note reminders for next seminar.



## Post-Seminar Content

 *Transition to Writing:*

Give participants a few minutes to write down key ideas that they thought, read and heard during the seminar discussion.

 *Writing Task:*

After reading this excerpt from *A New Earth* about consciousness and transformation, write a letter to yourself (3-5 paragraphs) for you to read during dark times in the school year, explaining the importance (personally/ professionally) of contemplating beauty. Support your response with reference to the text.



 *Brainstorm:*

Ask participants to jot down key words (and phrases) from the text that are worth remembering and note their thoughts and feelings about them.

 *Structure the Writing:*

Have participants make an outline of points that they'll put in their letter. Ask them to consider the order and how they will sequence the points, as well as the phrase(s) they will quote from the text.

 *First Draft:*

Ask participants to draft their ideas into sentences, considering their tone and being mindful to choose words that support their spirit.

 *Collaborative Revision:*

Have participants work in pairs and agree that they are reading aloud in order to insert punctuation at perfect pause points. During reading, in the partner pairs, they should take time to change words that are more fitting and/ or affirmative. Listener says back one point heard in the letter. Switch roles.

 *Edit:*

Ask participants to write (or type) a final version of this letter to themselves.

 *Publish:*

Give the following instruction: Put this letter in a place that you can refer back to, especially when you begin to feel harried during the school year. You might also find and save a picture of a flower with it.

*This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:*

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*Organization:* National Paideia Center



From *A New Earth* by Eckhart Tolle

## **The Flowering of Human Consciousness**

### *Evocation*

Earth, 114 million years ago, one morning just after sunrise: The first flower ever to appear on the planet opens up to receive the rays of the sun. Prior to this momentous event that heralds an evolutionary transformation in the life of plants, the planet had already been covered in vegetation for millions of years. The first flower probably did not survive for long, and flowers must have remained rare and isolated phenomena, since conditions were most likely not yet favorable for a widespread flowering to occur. One day, however, a critical threshold was reached, and suddenly there would have been an explosion of color and scent all over the planet—if a perceiving consciousness had been there to witness it.

Much later, those delicate and fragrant beings we call flowers would come to play an essential part of the evolution of consciousness of another species. Humans would increasingly be drawn to and fascinated by them. As the consciousness of human beings developed, flowers were most likely the first thing they came to value that had no utilitarian purpose for them, that is to say, was not linked in some way to survival. They provided inspiration to countless artists, poets, and mystics. Jesus tells us to contemplate the flowers and learn from them how to live. The Buddha is said to have given a “silent sermon” once during which he held up a flower and gazed at it. After a while, one of those present, a monk called Mahakasyapa, began to smile. He is said to have been the only one who had understood the sermon. According to legend, that smile (that is to say, realization) was handed down by twenty-eight successive masters and much later became to origin of Zen.

Seeing beauty in a flower could awaken humans, however, briefly, to the beauty that is an essential part of their own innermost being, their true nature. The first recognition of beauty was one of the most significant events in the evolution of human consciousness. The feelings of joy and love are intrinsically connected to that recognition. Without our fully realizing it, flowers would become for us an expression in form of that which is most high, most sacred, and ultimately formless within ourselves. Flowers, more fleeting, more ethereal, and more delicate than the plants out of which they emerged, would become like messengers from another realm,

like a bridge between the world of physical forms and the formless. They not only had a scent that was delicate and pleasing to humans, but also brought a fragrance from the realm of the spirit. Using the word “enlightenment” in a wider sense than the conventionally accepted one, we could look upon flowers as the enlightenment of plants.

Any life-form in any realm—mineral, vegetable, animal, or human—can be said to undergo “enlightenment.” It is, however, an extremely rare occurrence since it is more than an evolutionary progression: It also implies a discontinuity in its development, a leap to an entirely different level of Being and, most important, a lessening of materiality.

What could be heavier and more impenetrable than a rock, the densest of all forms? And yet some rocks undergo a change in their molecular structure, turn into crystals, and so become transparent to the light. Some carbons, under inconceivable heat and pressure, turn into diamonds, and some heavy minerals into other precious stones.

Most crawling reptilians, the most earthbound of all creatures, have remained unchanged for millions of years. Some, however, grew feathers and wings and turned into birds, thus defying the force of gravity that had held them for so long. They didn’t become better at crawling or walking, but transcended crawling and walking entirely.

Since time immemorial, flowers, crystals, precious stones, and birds have held special significance for the human spirit. Like all life-forms, they are, of course, temporary manifestations of the underlying on Life, one Consciousness. Their special significance and the reason why humans feel such fascination for and affinity with them can be attributed to their ethereal quality.

Once there is a certain degree of Presence, of still and alert attention in human beings’ perceptions, they can sense the divine life essence, the one indwelling consciousness or spirit in every creature, every life-form, recognize it as one with their own essence and so love it as themselves. Until this happens, however, most humans see only the outer forms, unaware of the inner essence, just as they are unaware of their own essence and identify only with their own physical and psychological form.

In the case of a flower, a crystal, precious stone, or bird, however, even someone with little or no Presence can occasionally sense that there is more there than the mere physical existence of that form, without knowing that this is the reason why he or she is drawn toward it, feels an affinity with it. Because of its ethereal nature, its form obscures the indwelling spirit to a

lesser degree than is the case with other life-forms. The exception to they are all the newborn life-forms—babies, puppies, kittens, lambs, and so on. They are fragile, delicate, not firmly established in materiality. An innocence, a sweetness and beauty that are not of this world still shine through them. They delight even relatively insensitive humans.

So when you are alert and contemplate a flower, crystal, or bird without naming it mentally, it becomes a window for you into the formless. There is an inner opening, however slight, into the realm of spirit. This is why these three “en-lightened” life-forms have played such an important part in the evolution of human consciousness since ancient times; why, for example, the jewel in the lotus flower is a central symbol of Buddhism and a white bird, the dove, signifies the Holy Spirit in Christianity. They have been preparing the ground for a more profound shift in planetary consciousness that is destined to take place in the human species. This is the spiritual awakening that we are beginning to witness now.