



# Vocational Discernment: The Bridge Builder

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## The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

**BWBR Description:** *Bonner Curriculum workshop uses 'The Bridge Builder' activity to challenge participants to think, with intentionality, about the importance of mentorship in their lives and the lives of others.*

**Overview:** The purpose of "The Bridge Builder" activity is to challenge participants to think, with intentionality, about the importance of mentorship in their lives and the lives of others. In addition, participants are given an opportunity to reflect upon the concept of legacy and to consider their personal legacy.

**Category:** Visioning, Personal Development, Vocational Discernment, Reflection, Career Planning

**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.



**Recommended Bonner Sequence:** This activity can be integrated with a junior renewal activity or at a senior retreat. It should be intentionally integrated with dialogue about mentoring; their own as well as the mentoring they offer others. The "Board of Directors" and/or "Tuesdays with Morrie" exercises are good follow-up

activities to continue the discussion about the role of mentors/guides in their lives.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Encourage participants to identify current or former mentors in their lives.
- Provoke participants to consider to whom they are extending their hand in mentorship.
- Challenge participants to think about being change agents in their relationships, and local and world communities.

### **Materials:**

- "Bridge Builder" poem
- Bridge Builder worksheets
- Pens and/or pencils
- "Dead Poet's Society" video clip (optional – see note in preparation)

### **How to Prepare:**

Read the activity to become familiar with the exercise. Facilitators are encouraged to practice a "dramatic reading" of the poem or identify in advance someone else to do so. It is important, if you choose to have the poem read aloud, that the reader is familiar with the language and the feel of the text to give the hearer the best possible listening experience.

If you choose to offer an even more sensory experience, you may choose to show the referenced clip from "Dead Poet's Society" during the introduction to the activity. If you choose to do so, you will want to secure appropriate AV equipment and cue the clip in advance.

### **How to Do/Brief Outline:**

The outline has the following four components:

- |                               |                                  |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1) Introduce Activity         | suggested time 5 minutes or less |
| 2) Read "Bridge Builder" Poem | suggested time 5 minutes or less |
| 3) Individual Reflection      | suggested time 5-10 minutes      |
| 4) Sharing                    | suggested time 20-30 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.*

*In the poem, "The Bridge Builder", the reader is challenged to think about the importance of legacy. Not only should our eyes be focused forward, but our hand should also be extended back, reaching out to those who will follow.*

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

## **Part 2) Poetry Reading**

Suggested time: No more than 5 minutes

If you are an effective reader or you have a participant who is gifted with dramatic interpretation, read the poem "The Bridge Builder" to participants. The reader is strongly encouraged to spend time with this piece prior to sharing it with the participants. This allows for a more meaningful and nuanced interpretation of the work. (In order to have attention focused solely on the reader, you choose to wait until Part 3 to distribute copies of the poem to participants.)

In the event you choose not to have the poem read aloud, distribute copies of the "The Bridge Builder" and ask participants to take some time to read it over and let it really sink in.

## **Part 3) Individual Reflection**

Suggested time: 10 minutes

After hearing and/or reading the poem, distribute copies of the discussion questions. If the poem was not distributed in Part 2, distribute it to participants at this time.

Say to participants:

*Keeping the words of the "Bridge Builder" in mind, please respond to the questions on the handout provided. Please feel free to refer back to the printed poem as necessary.*

#### **Part 4) Sharing**

Suggested time: 15 – 30 minutes

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

If there is a high level of emotional comfort among the participants, ask individuals to share their responses with the group.

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

## *THE BRIDGE BUILDER*

An old man, going a lone highway,  
Came at the evening, cold and gray,  
To a chasm, vast and deep and wide,  
Through which was flowing a sullen tide.  
The old man crossed in the twilight dim;  
The sullen stream had no fears for him;  
But he turned when safe on the other side  
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow pilgrim near,  
"You are wasting strength with building here;  
Your journey will end with the ending day;  
You never again must pass this way;  
You have crossed the chasm, deep and wide –  
Why build you the bridge at the eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head;  
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,  
"There followeth after me today  
A youth whose feet must pass this way.  
This chasm that has been naught to me  
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.  
He, too, must cross in the twilight dim;  
Good friend, I am building the bridge for him."

~ Will Allen Dromgoole

# ***"THE BRIDGE BUILDER"***

## **Discussion Questions**

After hearing and/or reading "*The Bridge Builder*" by William Dromgoole, individual(s) should use the questions below to guide reflection and make meaningful connections.

1. As you reflect on your life, who has served or is currently serving as the "old man"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Over what "chasm" did he or she build a bridge for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Are you a bridge builder? If so, then for whom are you constructing the bridge?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. The "fellow pilgrim" thinks that the "old man" is wasting time and energy building the bridge because he's already crossed the chasm. Who do you know that might share that perspective? What might someone be gaining by being singularly focused on a personal goal? What might someone be missing out on?

5. By building the bridge, the old man is leaving a legacy for the “fair-haired youth”. What is the legacy that you want to leave on this campus? With your family and friends? In your local and global communities?

6. What other thoughts do you have in response to this poem?