

## ***Damien – Teacher’s Guide***

### ***Father Damien***

Born Joseph de Veusters in 1840 in a small hamlet called Tremeloo in Belgium, the man who was to serve the Settlement on Moloka’i chose the religious name of Damien upon entering the priesthood in the missionary order of the Society of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Taking the place of his brother, a priest who had suffered a bout of typhus, Damien received permission to join the mission in Hawai’i. Full of his mission early on, he wrote to his parents: “Here I am a missionary in a corrupt, heretical, idolatrous country. How great my obligations are!”

A decade later, Damien chose to join sufferers of leprosy in the “government prison,” as he termed it, of the Moloka’i Settlement. During his first season, he visited each patient every week – a circuit that took five days, with each workday lasting 19 hours – while also working in the hospital, constructing homes, and helping to build coffins for the deaths that occurred daily. Damien’s quick rise to authority in the Settlement aroused the resentment of many already there, as well as that of his own superiors in the Hawai’ian mission.

Through the course of his ministry on Moloka’i, Damien’s views about leprosy changed: instead of a curse from God, as he initially thought leprosy to be, Damien instead came to believe that the disease could be something other than a punishment – perhaps even a blessing. Despite this belief, when his own symptoms began to appear, Damien at first maintained an anxious hope that he had not become infected. Only later did he interpret his illness as part of a divine plan, and vow to submit himself to what he was certain was God’s will. He tried to continue his ministry even after he began having difficulties walking and preaching in late 1888. At age 49, Father Damien died on April 15, 1889.

### ***Hansen’s Disease (Leprosy)***

From ancient times, the paralyzing disease that led to severe nerve damage, loss of feeling, and deterioration of the flesh was known as leprosy – a terrifying disease that caused disfigurement and that had no known cure. But after 1873, this condition became known as “Hansen’s Disease,” so named for Norwegian doctor Gerhard Armauer Hansen, who discovered the disease’s true cause. Dr. Hansen found that leprosy was not hereditary, as previously thought; nor was there any foundation to the Western belief that leprosy was a punishment from God, or the Hawai’ian belief that disease was the result of the anger of either one of the many Hawai’ian gods, or a person who could channel the gods’ supernatural power. Rather, a bacillus known today as *Mycobacterium leprae* is the source of the illness.

Hansen’s Disease is much less contagious than many other diseases, such as AIDS, SARS, or the Ebola virus, that have raised concerns in recent decades. Although Hansen’s Disease is transmitted through direct person-to-person contact, only about five percent of the world’s population is susceptible to contracting the illness – and transference of the bacillus usually requires repeated exposure over a long period of time.

Dr. Hansen’s important finding eventually led to the development of sulfone drugs in the 1940’s at the US Public Health Service National Leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana. Since 1981, a multi-drug therapy has been administered, consisting of dapson, rifampicin and clofazimine, which kills the pathogen and cures the patient. Yet, even after scientific developments proved that quarantine of people with Hansen’s Disease was unnecessary, medical policy in the US

continued to dictate that patients with Hansen's Disease were isolated until the 1980's and 1990's. Critics charged that such policies not only deprived patients of civil liberties, but also used health resources inefficiently and fostered undue social stigma against Hansen's Disease patients. Today medical treatment and social integration are the primary goals of most organizations fighting Hansen's Disease.

## *History of Hawai'i*

Hawai'i's history in story and legend is ancient and proud, dating back at least a thousand years before American colonies became a nation in 1776, though most of this history is unrecorded. The language of Hawai'i and archaeological discoveries indicate that Hawai'i was settled by two distinct waves of Polynesian migration. First, from the Marquesas, came a settlement as early as 600 or 700 AD, and then from the Society Islands, another migration about 1100 AD. Lacking instruments of navigation or charts or any kind, the Polynesians sailed into vast oceans. They staked their knowledge of the sky and its stars, the sea and its currents, the flight of birds and many other natural signs. They were superior seamen of their time.

In the centuries before the arrival of Captain Cook, Hawai'ian society was a highly stratified system with strictly maintained castes. Like medieval Europe and the other Polynesian nations, each caste had its assigned tasks and responsibilities. Not until 1810 was there a single king over all Hawai'i with the reign of Kamehameha. Before then, there were a number of small kingdoms that divided the islands and were often at war with each other.

The majority of Hawai'i's people were commoners (makaainana), subjects of the chief upon whose land they lived. They did most of the hard work: building fishpond walls and housing, fishing, farming, and making tapa cloth. The commoners paid taxes both to the king and to their chief and provided some warriors for the chief's army. These taxes took the form of food, clothing and other products.

The Hawai'ian temples (heiau) contained images that symbolized the gods. The four major gods were known as Ku, Kanaloa, Lono and Kane, who represented the universal forces. Commoners performed their own simple ceremonies to family or personal gods (aumakua) while the complicated religious life of the ali'i required the services of a kahuna in large temple complexes. The hula dance was performed as a form of religious rite to honor the gods and the chiefs. Usually dedicated to its patroness Laka, goddess of the hula, the ancient Hawai'ian dances were performed by both men and women.

Modern Hawai'ian history begins on January 20, 1778, when Captain James Cook's expedition made its first contact with the Hawai'ian people on the islands of Kauai and Niihau. Captain Cook was not the first man to "discover" the Hawai'ian Islands. He was the first known European to arrive. In 1852, other ethnic groups, including the Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Germans, began to arrive in successive waves. In 1893, Hawai'ian Queen Liliuokalani surrenders the Hawai'ian kingdom to the United States under pressure, and in 1898, Hawai'i was annexed to the United States. Hawai'i became the 50<sup>th</sup> U.S. state in 1959.

## ***Damien Discussion Topics and Activities***

### *Song of the Chanter Ka-'ehu*

(Originally written in Hawaiian, the last known composition of a composer, chanter, and hula master, who became a leper and died at the Kalaupapa settlement on Moloka'i; from *Damien*, by Aldyth Morris, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1980.)

What will become of Hawai'i?  
What will leprosy do to our land –  
disease of the despised, dreaded alike  
by white or brown or darker-skinned?

Strange when a man's neighbors  
become less than acquaintances.  
Seeing me they drew away.  
They moved to sit elsewhere, whispering,  
and a friend pointed a finger:  
"He is a leper."

I bowed my head.  
I knew it was true.  
In my heart I hugged my shame.

Word reached the medical authorities.  
The doctors sent the military to fetch us.  
We were caught like chickens, like cattle herded  
along roadway and country lane.  
Then they paraded us before the Board of Health  
but there was no health in that Board for such as we.  
Examining doctors eyed us, squinted this way and that.  
More fingers pointed Diamond Head way:  
"You go to Kala-wao!"

Again the militia took over.  
Soldiers escorted us to the wharf for farewell.  
Prisoners, we were marched aboard,  
victims of leprosy, branded for exile.  
Abandoned, cut off from family and dear ones,  
we were left alone with our grief, with our love.  
Rain of tears streamed from leper eyes.  
Leper cheeks glistened with raindrops in the sun.  
Never again would we look upon this land of ours,  
this lovely harbor town.

Quickly the sails were hoisted.  
Ropes dangled from the foremast,  
tails of wild animals writhing,  
whipping in the channel breeze.  
The *John Bull* drew anchor.  
In the stern the rudder turned.  
So sailed we forth to dim Moloka'i Island,  
enshrouded in fog.

So ends my song and this refrain.  
What will leprosy do to my people?  
What will become of our land?

Discussion/Activities:

**Disease:**

How have other more current diseases affected us in the United States, and worldwide?

- AIDS - quarantine, exile, social exclusion
- West Nile - massive insecticide spraying
- SARS - quarantine, travel restrictions, exile, military enforcement of quarantines
- influenza - quarantine

**Coping with Shame:**

One line of the chant reads: "In my heart I hugged my shame."

- The chanter embraces an identity of strength in coping with his plight, not allowing the disease or the resulting social rejection to defeat his spirit.
- **For high school or college:** Use this line of the chant as a launching pad for a journal entry, poem, short story, or short play about a true or fictional moment in which the student (or a fictional character) had an experience that caused shame or embarrassment, but which also proved to be a strength-building experience.
- **For elementary school:** Use this question as a launching pad for a picture or crayon drawing of a person who is drawing strength from an experience of shame, rejection, or embarrassment.

**Imagining the Future:**

The final line of the chant is a question: "What will become of our land?"

- **For high school or college:** Use this question as a launching pad for a poem, short story, or short play in order to *answer the question* using the example of another disease such as SARS, the Ebola virus, the West Nile virus, influenza, or even some imaginary disease.
- **For elementary school:** Use this question as a launching pad for a picture or crayon drawing of the land, affected by disease, *or* of the place to which sufferers of leprosy were taken, *or* of the sailing journey to the island or place of exile.

*Damien* – by Aldyth Morris

Discussion/Activities:

Act I:

**Labels:**

In Father Damien's very first monologue of Act I, he refers to "lepers" almost immediately.

- What do you think of this term, which is offensive to some?
- Why is it important to consider various names, such as "people with AIDS (PWA)" versus "AIDS victim," for those suffering from various diseases?
- Who should choose the label used to describe those who suffer from a particular disease?
- How is the label used to describe people with a particular disease linked to their self-identity, as opposed to simply describing a disease that they have?

### **United States, 1840 – 1889:**

Father Damien died on Palm Sunday at 11:45pm in 1889.

- **For high school:** Engage in an encyclopedia/internet research project in which you seek out what was happening in the United States in the years 1840 - 1889. What was happening in the United States between 1840 and 1889? What things were invented during those years? What wars were fought during those years? Who was President during those years? How many states were there in 1840, and in 1889? What was the newest state in 1889?

### **Final Wishes:**

Damien served those on Moloka'i Island for 16 years, between 1873 and 1889, and was the sole keeper of the Moloka'i cemetery. After his death, his body was exhumed in 1936 and returned to Belgium against Damien's expressed wishes.

- What are your wishes for your body, and for a funeral ceremony, following your death?
- How would you feel if someone did something contrary to your expressed wishes?
- **For high school or college:** Write a journal entry, poem, short story, or short play to describe a situation in which your, or a fictional character's, expressed wishes regarding your (or her/his) death were ignored by another person.

### **The Importance of Music:**

When Father Damien's casket is moved from Hawaii to this that will bear his body to Belgium, the military band plays a funeral dirge. Chants, songs, and music have also traditionally been important in Hawaiian culture: The Hawaiians were a people without writing, who preserved their history in chants and legends. Much of the early history has disappeared with the death of the kahunas (priest-craftsmen, superior in spiritual power even to Hawaiian kings) and other learned men whose function it was to pass on this knowledge, by means of chants and legends, to succeeding generations. Music and songs have also been very important for European and American culture, as well.

- What are some of your favorite songs? What are some songs you believe are important to American culture? Are the songs in these two categories the same? What's the difference between them? What does this mean for different ways that music can be "important" in a culture?

- **For elementary, middle, or high school:** Compose your own song, or your own funeral dirge.

### **New Arrivals:**

On March 17, 1864, Father Damien arrives on the French ship, the R.M. Wood, and sees the island of Moloka'i for first time. The people with leprosy call the island "Grey Island," and Father Damien describes it as a "living graveyard" with cliffs on one side, and vicious surf on the other three sides.

- **For elementary school:** Write a story or draw a picture, imagining your first sighting of an island. You might be aboard an American ship (U.S.S.) or a British ship (H.M.S.). Describe your journey, your approach, and what the island and its inhabitants look and sound like.

### **Memory:**

Father Damien describes many of his experiences through memory, looking back at the past from a later time.

- Some theorists argue that all memory is shaped by our selective attention in the past, and especially by our needs in the present.

- **For high school or college:** Write a journal entry or short story describing a memory, and how it might be shaped by the events and situation at the time the remembered event took place, as well as how recall of the event might be influenced by the situation in which the recalling takes place.

### **Difficult Choices:**

Father Damien chooses to volunteer to live among the people with leprosy on Moloka'i Island.

- **For high school or college:** Imagine that you have made a similar choice to live a secluded life among people who have a disease that appears to be both contagious and incurable. Write a journal entry or monologue describing why you have made this choice.
- **For elementary school:** Draw a picture or write a short story about a person who has chosen to live a secluded life among people with a serious contagious illness. What is life like on the island?

### **Rules:**

Father Damien, in his duties on Moloka'i Island, attends to both men and women at all hours of the day and night. In the course of his ministrations, he often visits them alone in their small homes, and sometimes touches them, contrary to some church rules. In this way, Damien had to create a balance between *caring* for his fellow people, and observing the *propriety* that his church demanded.

- **For high school or college:** When is it acceptable to break rules of proper conduct and appearance in order to demonstrate caring for others? Explain in a short essay.

### **Act II:**

#### **Charity:**

Father Damien emphasizes the importance of charity, and believes that everyone can help others in their own ways.

- **For elementary school:** What are examples of charity that you or your family have given to others? What was the situation? How did you feel about giving? What would it be like to be in a needy situation?

#### **Martyrdom:**

Some people viewed Father Damien as a martyr for choosing to live among people who had a seemingly contagious and fatal disease. A martyr is defined as "one who suffers for the sake of principle." But Damien often believed he was merely a committed priest, who was attending to the needs of people who needed his religious guidance.

- Do you believe Father Damien was a martyr, or merely a committed priest? Why?
- **For high school or college:** Much is heard of martyrdom worldwide in current conflicts, such as in the Middle East. Write a journal entry or short essay about your opinion of martyrdom: Are there any situations that you feel would motivate you to willingly suffer and become a martyr? Do you believe that suffering for the sake of principle is a way to demonstrate values? Describe a way in which you would demonstrate a principle in which you strongly believe.

#### **Praise:**

Many people praised Father Damien for the work that he did, but others believed that this praise detracted from the sacrifices that Damien made.

- Praise often feels good to receive, but can also corrupt those who receive praise, encouraging them to do good only to receive the praise for those actions. What is the right amount of praise for good deeds?
- **For elementary school:** Draw a picture or write a short story about a person who gives praise to another person, with either good or bad consequences for the person who gave the praise, or the person who received the praise.

#### **Being a Representative:**

Father Damien saw himself as a "representative" of the people with leprosy on Moloka'i Island.

- What does it mean to be a representative? Have you served as a representative for a group of people, at school or elsewhere? What was that experience like?

- **For high school or college:** Imagine a group for whom you would like to serve as a representative, and imagine what your goals might be on behalf of that group. Write a statement of advocacy on behalf of a chosen group.

### **Dealing with Temptation:**

Father Damien speaks about the challenges of dealing with temptations while he serves as the spiritual leader on Molokai Island.

- **For high school or college:** Imagine a time that you (or a fictional character) experienced a temptation. Write a journal entry or a short story about how it felt to experience that temptation. Then, describe how the temptation was overcome, or what the failed strategies and consequences were if the temptation was not overcome.

### **Sacrifice:**

Father Damien faces difficult choices while in Hawai'i. One such choice was to either leave the Settlement on Molokai Island permanently *or* never be allowed to leave the Settlement again for the rest of his life. Neither of these choices was a desirable choice – and both could be considered sacrifices in their own ways – yet Damien had to choose one of these two options.

- **For high school or college:** How do you choose between two options that both appear to require a serious sacrifice? Write a journal entry, short story, or a short play about an individual who must choose between two undesirable options.
- **For high school or college:** Just as Father Damien's actions were seen by some as a true sacrifice, and by others as an expression of mere vanity, all kinds of sacrifices may appear to others as a way to get unwarranted attention. When is a sacrifice genuine, and when does it become attention-getting? Write a journal entry or short story in which you or a fictional character experience the difference between true sacrifice and using a potential sacrifice as a way to get attention.

### **Laws and Lawlessness:**

When Father Damien first arrived in the Settlement on Molokai Island, he experienced it as a "lawless society" in which children were not protected from abuse or harm. One of Damien's first choices is to take on the role of a protector of children.

- What happens in a lawless society?
- What is the desirable balance between individual freedom and laws?
- What responsibility does a government have to not allow a lawless (mini-) society to exist?

### **Independence and Belonging:**

While on Molokai Island, Father Damien is offered a job in the Board of Health. But he refuses the job, because he wants to act independently, rather than be subject to the rules of the Board of Health.

- What is the difference between being an independent agent and being an employee in a hierarchical structure? How does being part of an organization offer resources that might not be available to individuals who act independently? How important is freedom to being able to fulfill one's goals? How should goals be formulated – by individuals, in teams, or by leaders? What are the pro's and con's of each type of position?

### **New Discoveries:**

Near the end of the play, Father Damien discovers that he now has the disease of leprosy, and he experiences a variety of feelings about his new condition.

- **For high school or college:** Write a journal entry in which you describe the first day of your discovery that you have a new terrible disease. Imagine how this disease changes your life, as well as how it changes the lives of your loved ones. Explore how other people might treat you, both out of malice and out of self-protection, and how you feel about this possible treatment.

### **Choosing a Future:**

Near the end of the play, Father Damien describes how his father had initially wanted him to go into the family business. But he recalls how he told his father that he wanted to be a priest instead.

- **For high school or college:** Write a journal entry, monologue, or a dialogue in which you talk to a parent or adult figure, rejecting that adult's plan for your future and arguing for your own choice. OR, write a journal entry or dialogue in which you take the perspective of the parent or adult figure, attempting to persuade your child to follow the path that you have laid out for her or him, and describe how you will feel if the child refuses.

### **Intentions and Outcomes:**

At the end of the play, Father Damien questions whether his work on Moloka'i Island did more harm than good.

- What were some situations in which you had good intentions, but things went awry? What did you learn when things went wrong? How were things turned around, or how could they have been turned around?

## ***Resource List***

### **History:**

*The Colony*, by John Tayman (2006)

*A Disease Apart: Leprosy in the Modern World*, by Tony Gould (2005)

*Carville: Remembering Leprosy in America*, by Marcia Gaudet (2004)

*Leper Priest of Moloka'i: The Father Damien Story*, by Richard Stewart (2000)

*The Lands of Father Damien: Kalaupapa, Molokai, Hawaii*, by James Brocker (1997)

*Exile in Paradise: The Isolation of Hawai'i's Leprosy Victims and Development of Kalaupapa Settlement, 1865 to the Present*, by Linda Greene (1985)

*The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature*, by Saul Nathaniel Brody (1974)

*Mother Marianne of Moloka'i*, by L.V. Jacks (1935)

"Father Damien" (chapter) in *Lay Morals, and Other Papers*, by Robert Louis Stevenson (1911)

### **Biography:**

*Gifts from the Shore: A Kalaupapa Diary*, by Roberta Jarrett (1993)

*Olivia: My Life of Exile in Kalaupapa*, by Olivia Robello Breitha (1988)

*Village of the Outcasts*, by Robert Wulff (1967)

*No One Must Ever Know*, by Betty Martin, edited by Evelyn Wells (1959)

*The Second Miracle*, by Peter Greave (1955)

*Miracle at Carville*, by Betty Martin, edited by Evelyn Wells (1950)

### **Novels:**

*The Pearl Diver: A Novel*, by Jeff Talarigo (2005)

*Moloka'i*, by Alan Brennert (2003)

*In the Shadow of the Pali: A Story of the Hawaiian Leper Colony*, by Lisa Cindrach (2002)

*Banner O'Brien*, by Linda Lael Miller (2001)

*My Name is Loa: A Story of Exile, Adventure, and Romance on the Island of Moloka'i*, written by Dorothea N. Buckingham (1999)

**For Youth:** *The Dark Light*, by Mette Newth, translated by Faith Ingwersen (1998, 2004)

### **Film:**

*Moloka'i: the Story of Father Damien*, directed by Paul Cox (2000)