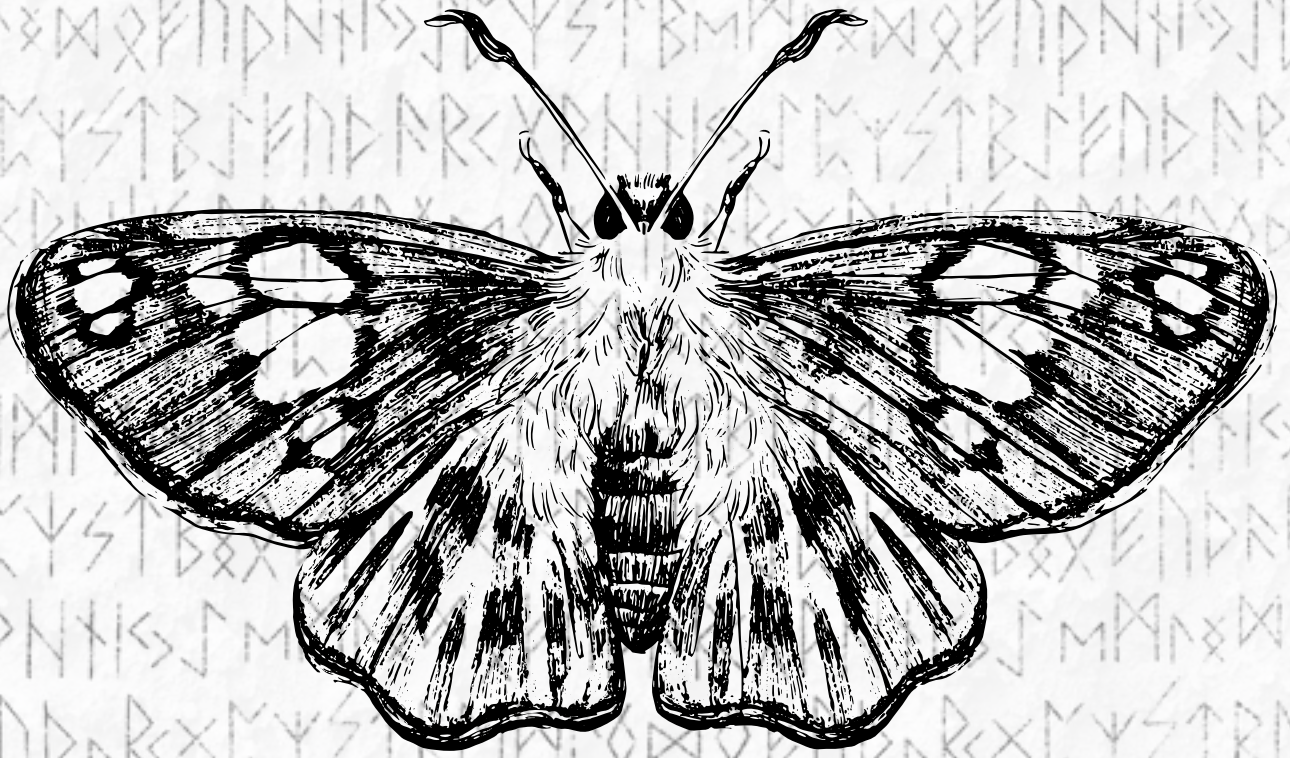
DEMYSTIFYING DEATH



4D Experience
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

In this world,
nothing is certain
except death and taxes.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

It's one of the first questions we ask our parents as children. For some of us, it was answered with religion or spirituality. For others, answers came from science. But all of us, at some point, had to face the reality that *no one truly knows*.

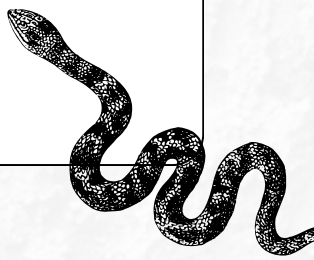
Death is **everywhere**, all the time, yet it is something most of us would rather not acknowledge or think about. The mere idea of it conjures up *visceral* feelings of discomfort, anxiety, confusion, and profound sadness within us.

In the digital age, global crises such political instability, war, genocide, disease, and natural catastrophes—all exacerbated by the realities of climate change—are *ever present* on our screens, forcing us to recognize not just the fragility of systems, but of *human* and *ecological* life itself.

For college students—many of whom are navigating identity exploration, increasing social tensions, and *major* transitions into **adulthood**—it is important to reflect on what truly matters to you, how you want to live, and take the steps to align your choices with your core values. This reflection invites you to engage *compassionately*, *courageously*, and *critically* with mortality.

Facing death with **curiosity** rather than avoidance helps us become more grounded, intentional, and engaged in shaping a life that feels *authentic* and *meaningful*. By normalizing conversations about love, loss, uncertainty, and impermanence, we can cultivate skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy, presence, meaning-making, and dialogue across difference—enhancing your growth across all four dimensions of the DU 4D Experience (*intellect, well-being, character,* and *purpose*).

- When you think about your own death, what **emotions** come up for you? What might those emotions be trying to *tell* you?



- After everything you have heard about mortality, what do **YOU** think happens when we die? *Why* do you think death exists? Do you think life would have any **meaning** without it?

WHY IT MATTERS

Research shows that mourning a significant death, or *bereavement*, is common among college students and can have measurable effects on **mental health**, physical well-being, and academic functioning. Up to 44% of students experience a loss within the first 24 months of college, and **60%** report having lost at least one person close to them by the *end* of their academic career. Whereas family death due to illness is the most reported type of loss, students also report losing a close friend to *car accidents*, *suicide*, and *cancer*.

Grief among college students is linked with *elevated depression*, anxiety, sleep disturbance, somatic complaints, and substance-use risk, which in turn *undermine motivation*, concentration, and classroom engagement. Studies also show that bereavement, especially sudden or closely felt losses, correlates with poorer **academic outcomes**, lower retention, and disrupted aspirations. As a result, grief can meaningfully affect students' *persistence* toward graduation.

Sociological work highlights that **social support** (including peers, faculty awareness, and formal campus services) as well as *visible* bereavement policies buffer against these harms, yet many students do not seek help or they find supports hard to access. Researchers therefore call for more *proactive* campus practices, grief education, and tailored mental health resources.

(Balk et al., 2010; Layne et al., 2018; Tureluren et al., 2022).

Death is one of the most intimate and personal issues a person will ever confront. While there may be immediate impacts on the family unit, death also has *broader* social implications.

Individual

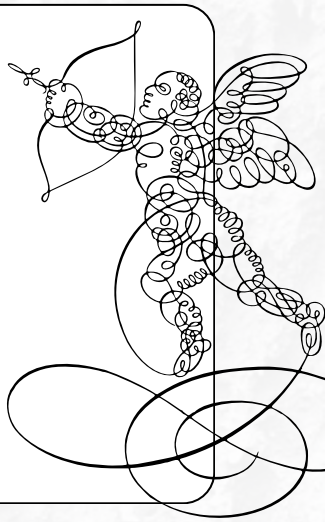
- At a micro level of analysis, death and the dying process involves the loss of *social roles* and a shift in existing roles. For instance, when a parent dies, you lose someone in the parental role.
- Older siblings, grandparents, or family friends may need to step in and take on responsibilities. Social relationships are also altered. The loss of a member of our social circle affects *all* who are part of that social network.
- As a result of a death, the group dynamics and relationships may need to be renegotiated and a new *shared meaning* developed.

Societal

- At a social institutional level, death and the resulting loss of a worker, a teacher, or community leader affects *institutional* processes and a shift of resources to fill *vacated* roles.
- While a single death may have one type of impact, numerous deaths may have a more immediate and significant societal impact. For example, the COVID-19-related workforce issues disrupted the flow of goods and services *worldwide*.

Think back to your childhood...

- What were some of your **earliest** experiences with death? Did you lose a member of your family or community?
- Who explained what was happening to you, and how did they **frame** it?
- Do you remember how you felt? *Confused, sad, anxious, scared*?
- Were you allowed to attend the funeral or grieve in some other way?
- If you were to have this conversation with a child today, what might you do the same or **differently**?



Now think about your adult life...

- Have you lost someone more **recently**? Were they close to you, or someone you respected?
- How did their death affect you and your loved ones? How did you cope, and what **strategies** did you use to maintain your mental health?
- How do you think their death impacted their social and professional networks (e.g. *their workplace, community organizations*)?
- What do you think their **legacy** will be?

DEFINING "DEATH"

While death may seem easy to define as the cessation of bodily functions, the reality is more **complex**. Historically, some individuals were *mistakenly* declared dead due to undetectable signs like shallow breathing.

Medical advancements have reduced such errors but also introduced new challenges, especially with life-support technologies. As a result, society has had to *clearly* define death, establish criteria for its determination, and formalize its recognition.

Clinical Death

- Traditionally, death was determined by the absence of vital signs like breathing and heartbeat. However, modern life support technologies can *artificially* sustain these functions, making it difficult to declare death based on traditional methods.
- This led the medical field to adopt the concept of **brain death**—defined in 1968 by the *Harvard Ad Hoc Committee*—as the irreversible loss of all brain activity, including spontaneous movement, brain-stem reflexes, and response to stimuli. This definition helps *clarify* death when life is maintained artificially.

(Kellehear, 2008; Brennan, 2014; Gregg, 2025)

LEGAL DEATH

- The definition of death impacts various legal and societal functions. When a person dies, it sets in motion **government** regulations regarding the handling and disposition of the body.
- Legal processes such as executing wills, managing inheritances, filing taxes, and determining civil or criminal liabilities all require *official proof of death*—typically a government-issued death certificate detailing the time, place, and sometimes the cause.
- As the medical community adopted brain-based criteria for determining death, legislative efforts followed to create *standardized* legal definitions that **aligned** with these medical standards, ensuring clarity and consistency in both medical and legal contexts.

SOCIAL DEATH

- Social death refers to the loss of **social identity**, connectedness, and bodily integrity, and it can occur *before*, *during*, or *after* biological death. It may be triggered by a specific event like biological death or unfold gradually through declining participation in daily life and shifting social roles.
- As a person nears death, their social status changes, often resulting in altered or *severed* relationships and expectations—for example, parents may no longer care for children, and roles may reverse as adult children become caregivers. These changes signal to others that social interactions and roles must **adjust**.
- After biological death, funeral rituals often mark the individual's transition from the world of the living to the spiritual or ancestral realm. Cultural beliefs *heavily* influence when and how social death is recognized.

THE TORAJA PEOPLE OF INDONESIA

The Toraja people of Indonesia offer a powerful example of how social death is **culturally** constructed and distinct from biological death.

In Torajan communities, a person is not considered socially dead at the moment their body biologically dies. Instead, the deceased remains an *active* social member of the household and community for weeks, months, or even years. During this time, the individual is referred to as *to' makula* (someone who is *sick* or *sleeping*).

Family members continue to care for the body by bathing it, changing its clothes, speaking to it, and involving it in daily routines. The deceased may be placed in communal spaces, moved around the home, or included in important events as a way of maintaining *ongoing* social bonds. This period reflects the Torajan belief that relationships **persist** beyond biological death and that social connectedness must be *honored* and *maintained*.

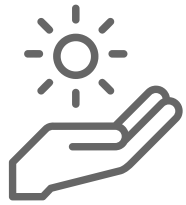
Social death, in Toraja culture, does not occur until the final funeral rituals are completed and the body leaves the family home. These elaborate ceremonies, known as *rambu solo'*, may involve large community gatherings, music, feasting, and the ritual sacrifice of animals. Only through these rites does the deceased transition into the realm of the ancestors and fully change their **social status**. This moment, rather than biological death, is what marks their *departure* from the living community.

The Torajan approach **challenges** Western assumptions that death is strictly biological and immediate, demonstrating that the meaning of death is deeply *social*, *relational*, and embedded in *cultural* practices that honor ongoing ties between the living and the dead.

(Adams, 1993; Aswar et al., 2020; Baan et al., 2022).

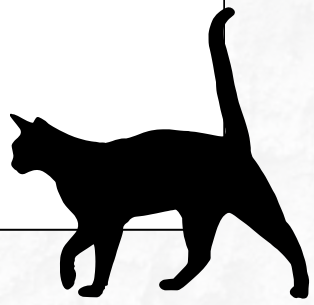
How/when is social death recognized in your family/community?

- What *rites, rituals, practices, or traditions* are used to observe death?
- In what ways do you try to **maintain** a sense of social connectedness to the deceased?
- What marks their **final** departure from their living communities?
- How might the Torajan understanding of social death *change* your own understanding of what it **means** to be dead?
- How might you want your loved ones to observe your *own* death?



What does legal death look like in your family/community?

- What typically happens after someone dies? **Who** takes care of the paperwork e.g. getting the death certificate or planning the funeral?
- Does your family ever have **conversations** about things like wills, inheritances, or end-of-life wishes? If so, how do they go? If not, what might be *preventing* you?
- Have you given any thought to your *own* end-of-life **wishes**? What might be some things you would include in a legal document?



WHAT IS DEATH POSITIVITY?

Death positivity is a cultural and philosophical **movement** that encourages people to *face*, *discuss*, and make *meaning* of death rather than avoiding or stigmatizing it.

Rooted in existential psychology, thanatology, and contemporary social movements, death positivity challenges the idea that death is taboo or inappropriate to talk about. Instead, it frames mortality as a *natural*, *universal* part of the human experience—something that becomes less frightening and more **grounding** when we engage with it openly. This perspective does not minimize grief or loss. Rather, it holds space for them while *empowering* people to reflect on their values, relationships, and purpose with greater clarity.

Core **principles** of death positivity include increasing comfort with mortality-related conversations, understanding the emotional and cultural dimensions of grief, and recognizing that every community has *wisdom*, *rituals*, and *practices* for navigating death. The movement also emphasizes agency—encouraging people to make informed choices about end-of-life care, their ecological legacy, and the emotional labor of grief.

On a psychological level, engaging with death-related topics can increase meaning-making, reduce existential anxiety, deepen empathy, and support emotional resilience. Sociologically, death positivity *challenges* the ways modern societies often hide, professionalize, or silence death, advocating instead for more **communal** support, transparency, and connection.

For college students, death positivity offers a framework to understand your own experiences with loss, uncertainty, and ongoing role and identity transitions. It invites you to consider how **acknowledging** impermanence can shape your *priorities*, *relationships*, and capacity for *presence*—ideas deeply engrained into the DU 4D Experience.

(Becker, 1973; Leland & Yalkin, 2018; Incorvaia, 2024)

HISTORY

The term, the **Death Positivity Movement**, was coined and popularized by a young funeral director, Caitlin Doughty, in 2011, but many of the movement's conceptual roots can be found dating back to the 1970s, including the beginnings of the *hospice movement*.

The *Natural Death Act*, passed in 1976, allowed individuals the right to refuse life sustaining medical intervention. Groundbreaking discussions on death and mortality were published in the landmark books, *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and *The Denial Of Death* by Ernest Becker. Other contributions include the *Death Café* developed by Jon Underwood, the first *End-of-Life Doula Program* in the United States created by social worker Henry Fersko-Weiss, and *the Order of the Good Death* founded in 2011 by Caitlin Doughty.

In general, the movement seeks to remove stigmas and offer education on the options, rights, and choices surrounding death. As espoused by *The Order of the Good Death*, their underlying ideals can be found in their **Eight Tenets** of the Death Positivity Movement.

TENETS

- I believe that by hiding death and dying behind closed doors we do more harm than good to our society.
- I believe that the culture of silence around death should be broken through discussion, gatherings, art, innovation, and scholarship.
- I believe that talking about and engaging with my inevitable death is not morbid, but displays a natural curiosity about the human condition.
- I believe that the dead body is not dangerous, and that everyone should be empowered (should they wish to be) to be involved in care for their own dead.
- I believe that the laws that govern death, dying and end-of-life care should ensure that a person's wishes are honored, regardless of sexual, gender, racial or religious identity.
- I believe that my death should be handled in a way that does not do great harm to the environment.
- I believe that my family and friends should know my end-of-life wishes, and that I should have the necessary paperwork to back-up those wishes.
- I believe that my open, honest advocacy around death can make a difference, and can change culture.

Modeling Death Positivity

ANDREW GARFIELD

- Andrew Garfield has spoken quite openly about grieving the death of his mother (who died in 2019), even in **unexpected** public forums. In a widely viewed appearance on *Sesame Street*, he sat with Elmo and tearfully explained that "it's okay to miss somebody," calling his sadness a "gift" because it reflects the depth of his love for his mother.
- In numerous interviews, he has described grief as "*unexpressed love*" and insisted that mourning is a **valid**, lasting mode of love and memory—something he doesn't want to rush through or hide. By refusing to *sanitize* his grief or treat it like a shameful secret, Garfield normalizes honest emotional pain as part of the human condition.
- His vulnerability, especially as a man, **challenges** norms that perpetuate emotional stoicism, and instead calls for compassion, shared humanity, and open conversations about loss—including with *children*.

MEGAN THEE STALLION

- Megan Thee Stallion has also opened a very **public** and honest dialogue about grief, mental health, and the death of loved ones. In the documentary *Megan Thee Stallion: In Her Words*, she courageously recounts the heartbreaking experience of losing her mother (and manager) to a brain tumor in 2019—including the *painful* decision to take her off life support.
- She admits that grief propelled her into a deep sadness and shook her sense of **identity**: "I didn't know I needed therapy until one day I was like, 'Damn, I'm really sad, and it's really scary how sad I am,'" she said.
- Rather than hiding that pain, Megan leaned into therapy, self-reflection, and creative expression, and she now uses her **platform** to encourage others to do the same. As a Black queer woman, Megan models *resilience* in speaking out about her emotional struggles and breaking cultural stigma even in the face of public scrutiny and global fame.

- What **values** feel most important to you when you imagine the kind of life you want to look back on? Are you *living* them now?

- Knowing that you have **limited** time, what relationships, priorities, or dreams would you invest in more *deeply* going forward?

- How can you help **break** the culture of silence around death? What projects, *acts of service*, creative arts, or research can you pursue?

- In what ways might *facing* mortality help you live with more **gratitude**, presence, and authenticity as a college student?

Social Determinants of Health

Health is not just the result of biology or individual behavior—it is powerfully shaped by **social, political,** and **economic** conditions which influence our risk of mortality. Individuals do not have equal access to these conditions necessary to support human life, producing significant *disparities* in health outcomes, quality of life, and even quality of death across social groups.

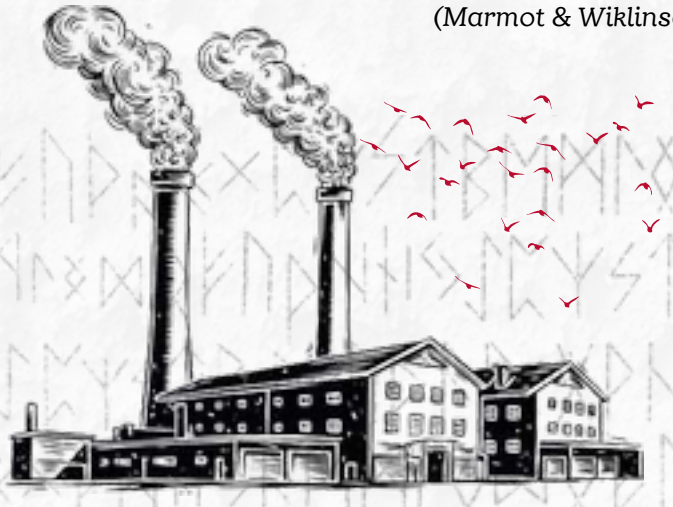
Level of educational attainment, employment conditions, socioeconomic status, access to food, healthcare, housing, as well as *neighborhood and environmental conditions*, all influence an individual's risk of developing negative health outcomes.

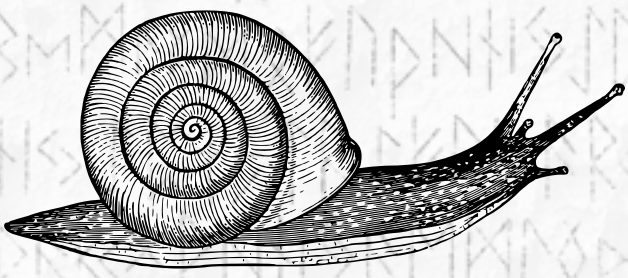
For example, harmful **workplace conditions** such as fatal and non-fatal injuries, exposure to harmful chemicals, sexual harassment, and interpersonal conflict can increase risks for stroke, heart attack, depression, and anxiety. Lack of physical access to nutritious food, limited transportation options, and rising costs contribute to *food insecurity*, which can increase risks of obesity, chronic disease, and even mental health disorders.

Research shows that underserved populations face *systemic* barriers to accessing these conditions and are at even greater risk of adverse health outcomes. Black individuals face higher unemployment rates, exposure to **environmental hazards** at work and in their neighborhoods, barriers to education, and risks of poverty, food insecurity, and housing instability.

Individuals with disabilities are also at higher risk of food insecurity, limited housing and employment options, lack of access to insurance and preventive and primary care, and *social isolation* due to inaccessible public spaces, limited transportation, and **systemic exclusion** from community and health programs. Women report bias and dismissal in medical settings, and LGBTQ+ individuals report being denied care *outright* or experiencing harassment in healthcare and in the workplace.

(Marmot & Wiklinson, 2005; Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014; HHS, 2025).





"The Good Death"

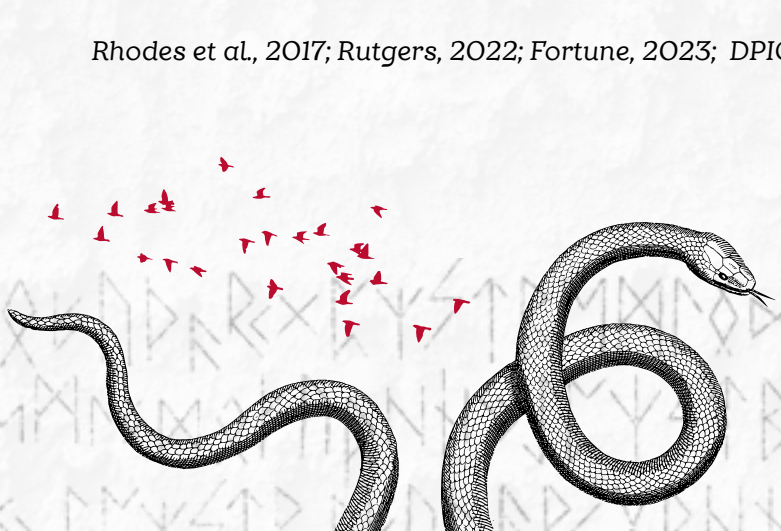
Everyone deserves the right to **die with dignity**. However, individuals dealing with inequalities in social health and therefore a lower quality of life, are also at greater risk of a *lower quality of death*. Disparities persist across social groups in access to end-of-life care and choices, grief and social support services, and even protection from the death penalty.

White, wealthier, and insured individuals are more likely to afford *comprehensive* palliative care and hospice services, as well as utilize **medical aid in dying** at the end of life, whereas low-income and BIPOC+ communities lack access to these services. A study found that 82% of hospice patients in the U.S. were white, while only 8% were African American and 6% were Hispanic. As of 2025, only 12 U.S. jurisdictions have legalized medial aid in dying (including *Oregon, California, and Colorado*), leaving individuals in rural, conservative, or lower-income states *without* access to this option.

BIPOC+ communities are also less likely to receive adequate **mental health support** in times of grief due to systemic healthcare disparities and *cultural stigma* around seeking help. In the U.S., around 69% of employers offer paid bereavement leave, but most grieving Americans receive just 3 days. Low-wage workers are less likely to benefit, leaving many to grieve while still needing to work multiple jobs or risk *financial instability*. Undocumented immigrants and incarcerated individuals face heightened barriers to processing grief, often denied the opportunity to attend funerals or say goodbye to loved ones.

Furthermore, research in criminal justice shows that Black individuals face harsher penalties than white individuals for both violent and non-violent crimes, and are more likely to be convinced to **death row**, *especially* if the victim in the case was white. Black individuals are also more likely to be wrongfully convicted and later *exonerated* from death row, and individuals in poverty often lack access to quality legal defense, increasing their chances of receiving a death sentence.

Rhodes et al., 2017; Rutgers, 2022; Fortune, 2023; DPIC, 2025)



What social identities do you hold? List them here.

- *Race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ability, geographic locations of your communities.*

- How might these social identities *influence* your **access** to nutritious food, safe housing, a clean natural environment, education and employment opportunities, and quality and affordable healthcare?

- How might these social identities *impact* the **quality** of your death e.g. access to end-of-life care and choices, grief and social support for your loved ones, or even protection from the death penalty?

- What can you do in your campus or local **community** to serve those with unequal access to the conditions necessary to support life? How and where can you advocate to ensure a good life and “a good death” for all?

DEATH AROUND THE WORLD

Cultures around the world engage with death in deeply **varied**, meaningful ways that reflect their histories, spiritual beliefs, and understandings of what it means to be human.

In many Indigenous traditions, death is seen as a *transition* rather than an ending, with ongoing relationships maintained through ceremony, offerings, and storytelling. In Mexico, Día de los Muertos blends Indigenous and Catholic practices to create a vibrant celebration that honors ancestors through altars, food, and communal *remembrance*. Tibetan Buddhists practice sky burials, emphasizing impermanence and the *interdependence* of all beings, while Hindu communities often cremate loved ones along riverbanks as an act of spiritual purification and *release*. These practices illustrate how death rituals can weave together *spirituality*, *community*, and **cultural identity**.

Across many societies, rituals surrounding death also serve **social purposes**: they provide structure during grief, reinforce communal bonds, and help individuals make meaning in times of profound change. Some cultures prioritize *public* mourning and collective support, while others place value on privacy, internal reflection, or *quiet* reverence.

Increasingly, global migration and multicultural communities mean that students may encounter a *rich blend of traditions*—memorial services that combine storytelling with prayer, hybrid ceremonies that reflect multiple identities, or contemporary practices such as *virtual* memorials. Exploring how different cultures navigate death not only broadens students' understanding of global diversity, but also highlights shared human needs: to honor loved ones, process loss, and find *meaning* in life's most **universal** transition.

(Garces-Foley, 2006; Selin & Rakoff, 2019; Eyetsemitan, 2021)

ALTERNATIVE DISPOSAL

Alternative, **eco-friendly** forms of burial and body disposition are gaining attention as people rethink the environmental impact of traditional practices. For college students navigating climate issues, ethics, sustainability, and shifting cultural norms, exploring alternative burial practices offers a way to *align* your ecological values with end-of-life choices. In this way, you can consider how your final acts reflect care for the planet, cultural sensitivity, and the ecological *legacy* you leave behind.

Conventional embalming relies on **chemicals** like formaldehyde, casket production uses significant wood and metal resources, and cemetery maintenance requires *ongoing* land, water, and energy. Standard cremation, while common, also generates carbon emissions. In contrast, green or natural burial emphasizes *simplicity* and ecological sustainability. Bodies are buried without embalming, in biodegradable shrouds or caskets, in areas that prioritize natural vegetation and conservation. This approach allows the body to decompose *naturally* and return nutrients to the soil, reducing environmental harm and reconnecting death with natural cycles.

Another emerging option is water cremation, also known as alkaline hydrolysis or aquamation. This process uses water, heat, and alkali to accelerate natural decomposition, producing far fewer carbon emissions than flame cremation and using a *fraction* of the energy. Similarly, human **composting** (formally known as natural organic reduction) has gained momentum. Through a controlled process of microbial transformation, the body becomes nutrient-rich soil over several weeks. This method not only minimizes environmental impact but *symbolically* highlights renewal and ecological interdependence.

More experimental or **artistic** eco-options are also becoming part of public conversations. Mushroom burial suits, for example, use fungal mycelium to help break down the body and neutralize toxins. Reef memorials incorporate cremated remains into structures that support marine life and coral growth. Tree-burial concepts, such as biodegradable “seed pod” urns, allow cremated or composted remains to nourish a growing tree. While some of these methods are limited by regional laws, they reflect a broader cultural shift toward sustainability, meaning-making, and *reconnection* with nature.

(Zeng et al., 2016; Fournier, 2018; Yu, 2024)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Educate yourself and others about the systems which perpetuate inequalities in health outcomes, mortality risk, and quality of death.

Support and advocate for equitable healthcare policies, including the right to die and access to palliative and hospice care for the underserved.

Donate to or volunteer with organizations that provide both life and end-of-life support to individuals most in need (e.g., houseless, incarcerated, or undocumented individuals).

Support reforms in the criminal justice and healthcare systems that address preventable deaths, neglect, and systemic violence.

Include death equity in conversations about human rights, ensuring it's not left out of broader advocacy work.

Challenge stigmas/taboos around death and grief, and learn respectfully about how other cultures observe and navigate mortality.

Promote access to grief counseling and mental health services, particularly for low-income and communities of color.

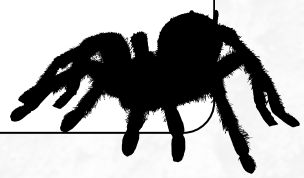
Ensure your own end-of-life plans reflect your values, and talk with loved ones about theirs, encouraging them to consider ecological impacts.

Seek out stories (e.g. books, shows, films, podcasts) which explore themes of death, loss, and grief, and host a book club or watch party.

Host or attend community discussions or *Death Cafés* that center honest and vulnerable conversations about death, dying, and grief.

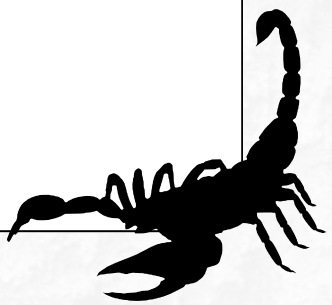
- What does “a good death” mean for you? How do you want to be *remembered*? What do you want your **legacy** to be?

- What **ecological** considerations might you factor into your end-of-life wishes, *balancing* cultural tradition with sustainability?



- What are 3 **action** steps you can take to practice death positivity in your life? *Who* can you learn and engage these topics with?

- What do you think the **relationship** between death and humans will look like in the future? How might technology, cultural trends, and climate change reshape how we *experience* and *observe* death?



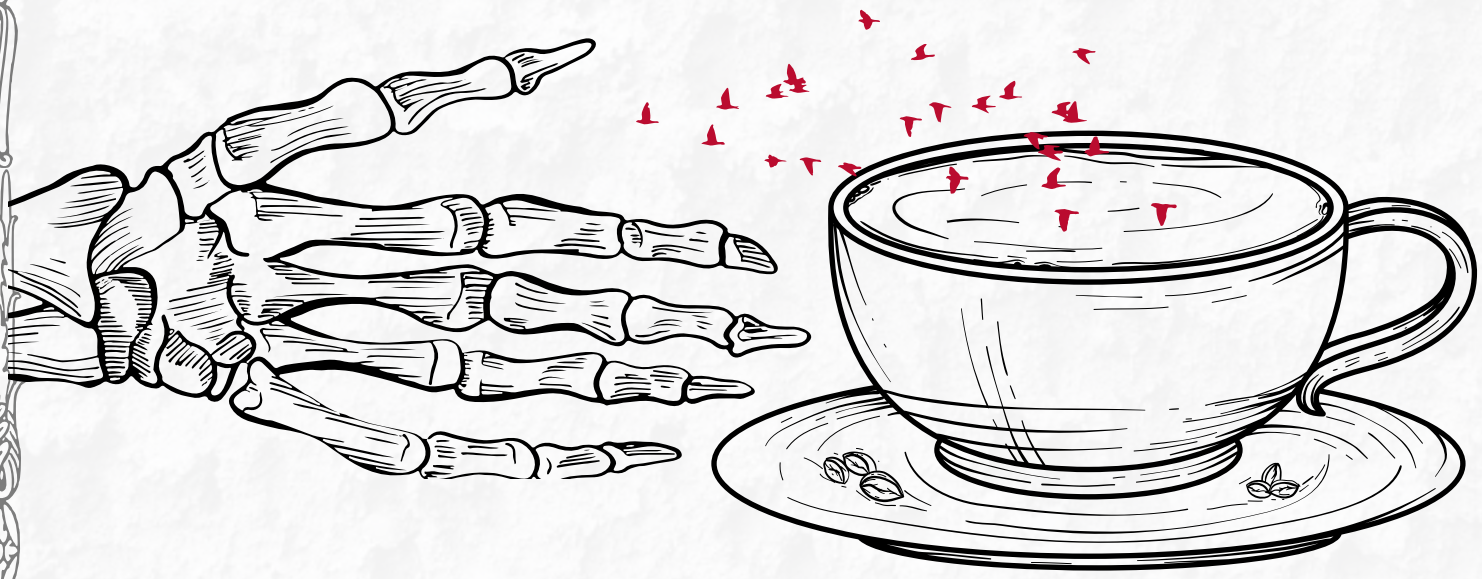
DEATH CAFÉ

A **Death Café** is a social gathering, usually with tea and cake, where people talk openly about death and dying. It was founded in 2011 by *Jon Underwood* in the UK, inspired by the work of Swiss sociologist *Bernard Crettaz*. Since then, thousands of Death Cafés have taken place around the world.

Held in **community** spaces, libraries, private homes, or even online, Death Cafés offer a *non-judgmental* environment to have informal and honest conversations about mortality. All beliefs and perspectives are welcome, and the goal isn't to provide grief counseling or promote any specific agenda, but to create space for individuals to share their *thoughts, fears, hopes,* and *dreams*. There is no fixed curriculum, and a facilitator guides the conversation.

Common **topics** include personal experiences with death and loss, anxieties about dying, and ideas of what makes a "good death." Participants may also talk about funeral planning, legacies, cultural or religious beliefs about the afterlife, and practical matters like advance directives or green burial options.

Having these conversations or attending a Death Café is a powerful way of taking action at the individual or community level. It also represents **social action** at the systemic level—rather than marching with signs, Death Cafés form *compassionate* communities that care for one another, share resources, and build solidarity and resilience.



NAVIGATING GRIEF IN COLLEGE

For most college students, the **reality** is you will most likely experience a significant loss by the time you graduate. Grief is a *messy, complicated, non-linear* process—and even more so in the college environment as students deal with *competing* social, academic, and professional demands, and are left to process their grief *away* from their family and closest communities.

Recognizing that there is no *right* and *wrong* way or timeline to grieve, it is important to consider some healthy and unhealthy coping strategies, and try to stay honest, intentional, and conscientious about which practices are truly serving your healing rather than *keeping you stuck*.

- Talk to friends and relatives about what you are going through. But consider talking to a **professional** to get an external perspective and alleviate the burdens of emotional labor on those closest to you.
- Try not to throw yourself into work, school, or other diversions like social media or partying. These can be a way to "not feel", but pushing emotions aside to "keep grinding" or find **escapism** often leads to burnout and worse mental health outcomes in the long run.
- In times of grief, sometimes the simplest tasks like taking a shower or making breakfast can feel overwhelming or **exhausting**. Be extra patient and gentle with yourself, and cancel what you can from your schedule. You only have so many spoons, save them for the most important responsibilities and the things that give you joy.
- Stick to the basics of **wellbeing**—eat a comforting meal, watch your favorite nostalgic movies and TV shows, rest and sleep, move your body, do something artistic or creative, spend time in nature, hug your pets, connect with loved ones—but ensure to take time to be alone.
- There will be days when you feel better, and days when you feel worse. These are not setbacks but a **natural** part of the healing process. Remember that overall, you are still making progress.
- Find small ways to remember and **honor** this person in your life. Volunteer your time and service to a cause they cared about. Write a story or poem about their life and impact on you, and share it at an open mic. Carry a totem of theirs with you, or put their picture on your desk or wallpaper.

A LETTER TO THE DEAD

In the space below, write a letter to a **loved one** you lost. You can share:

- Some of your earliest and fondest memories of them.
- Qualities and traits you admire most and wish to develop.
- Lessons and wisdom they shared that you carry with you today.
- Times they showed up to help you and others, directly and indirectly.
- Ways they served their community and created social change.
- What you think their legacy is, and how it might shape the next generation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

University of Denver Resources

- Visit the Health & Counselling Center for quality medical and mental healthcare services, and contact Student Outreach & Support for help with difficult transitions.

The Conversation Project

- Free downloadable guides and resources to help you and your family members discuss and plan end-of-life care, choices, and preferences.

Death Over Dinner

- On-line tool to help you organize an evening with family and friends to discuss matters related to death at home around the dinner table.

The Order of the Good Death

- Comprehensive guides on all things end-of-life planning, including things like organ donation, pet death, and infant and child death.

Working in Death

- Information on careers and working in the death industry, including how to become a mortician or death doula.

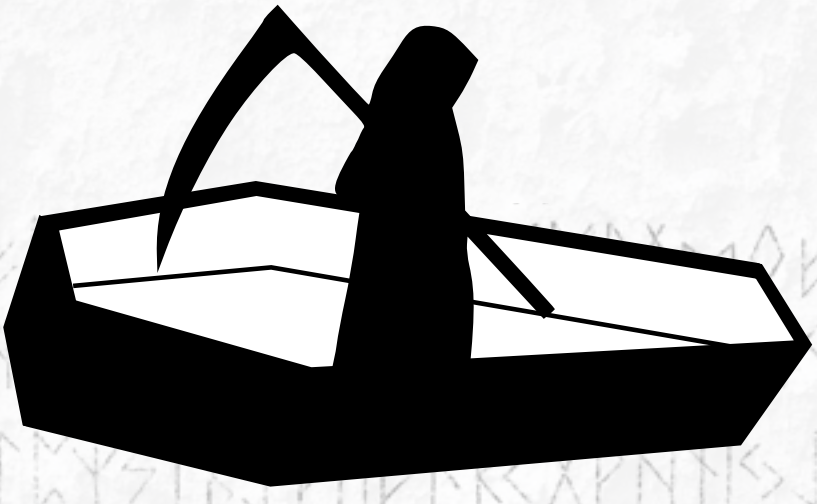
Movies, Books & Podcasts

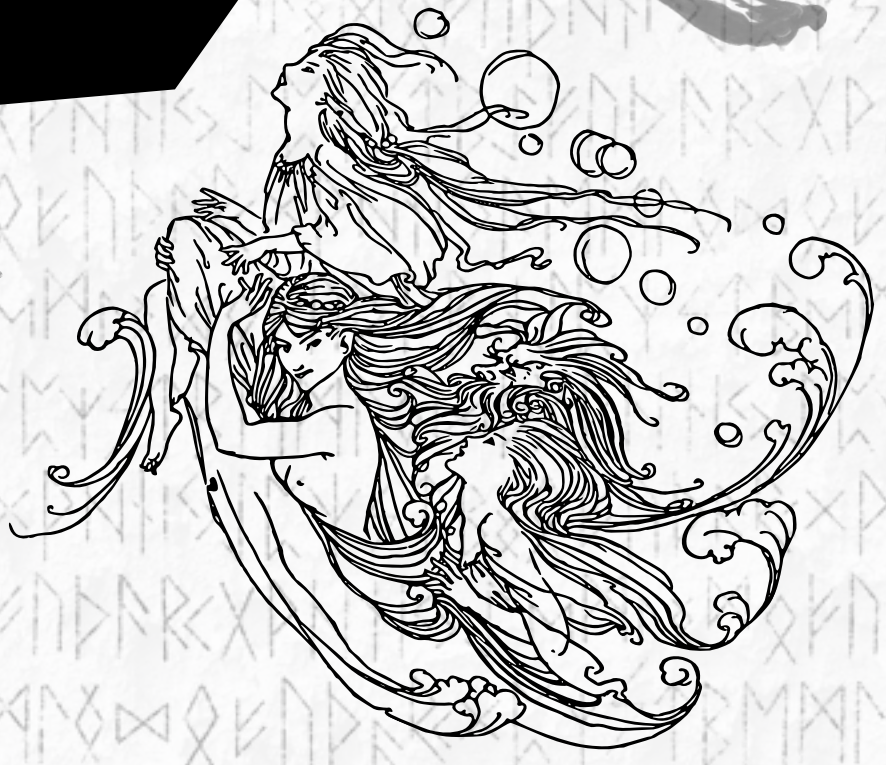
- Curated lists of films, tv shows, documentaries, books, and podcasts exploring death, loss, and grief in nuanced ways.

Thank You!

Please take a few minutes to give us some **feedback on your experience** using this zine workbook.

& Visit **4D Education With An Edge** for more workbooks and resources!





DEMYSTIFYING DEATH

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