

Christian Worldview of English Literature

Approaching English Literature through the lenses of Hope, Truth, Identity, and Calling means teaching more than the plot elements, but instead forming students in how they read, interpret, and respond to the text.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

TRUTH

We must be forming students who are able to distinguish between an author portraying or describing something and endorsing it. To do so, we must emphasize careful reading, interpretation, and evaluation of a text to arrive at the author's intended meaning, not our response to the text.

- Can we trust the narrator?
- What does this story get right (or wrong) about reality? Human nature? Morality?
- What assumptions are in the text? Are those assumptions correct?
- Where is truth distorted in the text, and why?

IDENTITY

This is perhaps one of the best places to engage a text through a Christian worldview. By evaluating the four relationships in the text (upward, inward, outward, downward) and comparing those relationships to what we see in Scripture, we can effectively compare the author's worldview to that of Scripture.

- What does this text say about each of the four relationships?
- How are the plot elements tied to the disruption of these relationships?
 - Describe the characters' relationships with themselves (their internal struggles, etc.).
 - Describe the characters' relationships with others (their external struggles, etc.).
 - Describe the characters' relationship with creation (their jobs, technology, etc.)
- What virtues are being promoted? Why and how?
- What vices are being discouraged? Why and how?

HOPE

Almost every story includes some element of suffering or brokenness and moves towards resolution or the restoration of something that was broken. Stories reflect our longing for redemption and justice, while highlighting themes of grace, sacrifice, and mercy. Stories have shaped the shared morals of society, inspired reforms, and helped to envision a better future.

But what is the basis for that hope?

The answer to this question is a great place to start when considering how to teach a text from the Christian worldview.

Here are some other questions you can ask:

- Where do we see hope in this text? Is this a true or false sense of hope?
- How is this story moving or failing to move toward justice?
- How do the characters endure hardship, and what does that say about human longings?
- How do all of the answers to these questions compare to how Scripture answers these questions?

CALLING

We can approach teaching literature from a few angles using the questions related to calling.

- How have stories been used for evil? Stories and language can be used for propaganda, manipulation, or the justification of injustice or harmful ideologies.
- How have stories been used for good? Stories have exposed injustice, given voice to those who are vulnerable and overlooked, and provided examples of faithfulness, hard work, and sacrificial love.
- How can stories be used to create what is missing?

Literary Analysis

1. What is being celebrated as good in this story? Is this really good?
2. What is being condoned as evil in this story? Is this really evil?
3. What do the characters identify as missing that needs to be created? Why and how are they creating?
4. What does the story highlight as broken that needs to be fixed? Is it really broken?
5. What solution does the story propose? Is this a plausible solution?

Then, compare your answers to these questions to how Scripture would answer these questions.

Literary Analysis Activity

Use some or all of these questions to analyze literary stories or characters (can also be used for film or TV).

- Does _____ (character name) have a source of hope? What is _____'s hope based on?
- What assumptions about reality, people, or the purpose of life does _____ (or the author) make? Are those assumptions correct?
- Describe _____'s relationship with others. What conflicts arise, and why? Is there a resolution to these conflicts?
- What does this story identify as broken? Is it actually broken?
- What solution does this story propose to the brokenness? Does this solution align with Scripture? If not, what is the true solution to the brokenness?

