



Shaping theFuture

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Bridging Literature to Bible Stories

by Lauren Wellen

Students in our Lutheran Schools, whether they read a religious or a secular book, need to use their Christian beliefs and practices to view all literature through a Christian lens. For students to be able to do this, effective teachers make literature the heart of the classroom. Teachers use a variety of genres or types of literature, read high quality literature, and share and incorporate literature throughout the day in activities and subjects that they teach.

Students may have a basic understanding of what they are reading as they locate and recall the information. They even may be able to compare and contrast the information, explain the character, or the relations, but as they begin to critique, evaluate, and synthesize, which are higher levels of thinking, their comprehension becomes limited in meaning.

By reading high-quality variety of genres such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, traditional literature, periodicals, reference books, and even graphic novels, students must comprehend the text, understand text structures, and know the author's purpose—which is called, "The Big Idea." Examples of these are:

"The Big Idea" or main purpose helps students focus on what they are reading. Authors write for many reasons. Some authors may give facts or true information about a subject. They are writing to inform. Other authors write fiction stories or stories that are not true. They write these stories to entertain you. And still other authors may write to persuade or to try to get you to do something. The main purpose of the book is to understand the author's meaning. Examples are: fruits of the spirit such as promoting values of love, joy, peace, forgiveness, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are big ideas. The main idea of the text varies from facts and information, or it could be values such as friendship, cooperation, courage, responsibility. In Religion class or Jesus Time, the big idea or purpose is key to comprehension.

Comprehension or making meaning has to happen in order for students to do well in school. So how can teachers help students comprehend? No matter what age, teachers need to model the following:

- Read aloud to facilitate thinking and learning
- Provide instruction on the difference between fiction and non-fiction
 - Fiction: characters, settings, and plot, and will have a beginning, middle, and end
 - Non-fiction: titles, data, headings, rows, labels, and other features
- Develop fluency
- Connect literature and writing
- Integrate literature across the curriculum

Bridge Literature to Bible Stories

As Lutheran educators, we shouldn't be afraid of using the Bible and Bible stories in our reading curriculum. The Bible is traditional literature which helps students understand other literature through the characters, incidents, poems, proverbs, and parables. Children's books based on individual stories from the Bible are especially useful to introduce children to literature. Include literature throughout the curriculum. Literature is best used when it is integrated, meaningful, and inquiry-based. The more

"All children deserve to know the spiritual and religious beliefs that have shaped the world in which they live. This religious heritage is often conveyed in the form of stories."

Charlotte Huck's *Children's Literature*,
Kiefer, 2010, p. 272

"Literature can educate the mind and heart."

Kiefer, 2010, p. 14

"Our fear should not be that children will know the Bible; rather, it should be that they will not know it. Whatever our religious persuasion, children



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Review, Reflect, Resolve

Which literature that you already use in your classroom has the best potential for bridging to Scripture? How will you (do you) make that happen?

Chicken or egg question: Should you be bridging secular literature to Bible accounts or Bible accounts to secular literature? (Is there a difference?)

Links & Resources

Many of the Christian books listed in this article are published by Concordia Publishing House.



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of *Shaping the Future*:

Twitter: A Great Tool for Educators by Kevin Creutz (ETnet)

Crossing Over from Fear to Hope by Rev. Dean Nadasdy (Feature)

Back to Nature by Cynthia Hasseldahl (LEADnet)

content area courses can coordinate with literacy and literature, the more relevant and meaningful learning becomes. KASTEN ET AL. , 2005

The following themes bridge religious and secular literature to Bible Stories.

Religious books

Creation

- Marxhausen's *A Picture of God 3 in 1*
- Paul Maier's *The Creation*

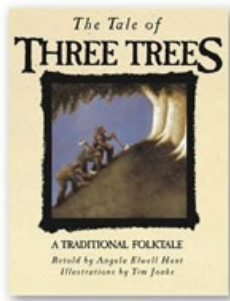
Friendship

God Loves You

Mary Manz Simon's *Hear Me Read* books and Bible

Water, Baptism, Giving Thanks, and Heaven

- *God Made Me His Child in Baptism*
- *God Chose You*
- Arch Book-*The Thankful Leper*
- *Grandpa is There a Heaven?*



Christmas, Easter, Jesus Stills the Storm, Anytime

- Hunt's *The Tale of the Three Trees* tells the story of three trees which are cut down and become the manger, the boat as Jesus stills the storm, and the cross.
- This book can be read any time of the school year and works well as Reader's Theater, having various students read a page of the story.

Secular Books

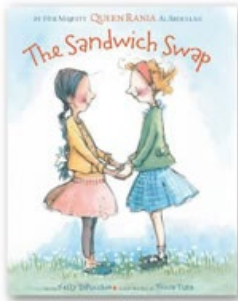
Creation

Eric Carle, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*

Bruce Hiscock, *The Big Tree* integrates social studies as a timeline of world events as the tree grows, science as the production of syrup, and literature as a book for reading aloud or

silently.

Gail Gibbon, *Bats, Cats, Spiders and others*



Friendship

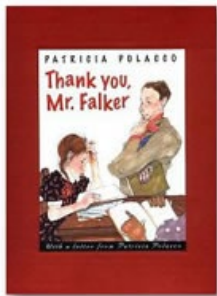
- Queen Abullah, *The Sandwich Shop* is a comparison of two students who have different lunches and shows how they learn to share their differences.
- Marcus Pfister, *The Rainbow Fish*

The World

- *How to Make an Apple Pie and See the World* tells how the ingredients for the pie are collected from around the world.
- *Miss Rumphius* must complete three wishes, one is to beautify the world.

Family, Love

- A story about Michael Jordan, *Salt in His Shoes*, shows how he learns to work hard to complete a task.
- *Knots on a Counting Rope* works well as Reader's Theater as it is written in the two voices of the grandfather and grandson sharing their love.



Thanks

Patricia Polacco, *Thank You, Mr. Falker* tells the story of a girl, who is a struggling reader, who learns how to read because her teacher cared.

Worries, Fear, Dying

- Kevin Henke, *Wemberley Worried*
- Cynthia Rylant, *Dog Heaven* (can be considered a religious book)

should not be denied their knowledge of the traditional literature of the Bible. Through the Bible, children can link with the common bonds of humanity from the beginning of recorded time, as well as a foundation for future reading."

Kiefer, 2010, pp. 268 and 272

Reading and comprehension strategies

By using these books with appropriate strategies, students become good readers and writers. Try a few of the following strategies:

Before Reading

- Read for a purpose.
- Build background knowledge with word webs and KWL chart.
- Provide a sneak preview of the book; read the back cover if there is an synopsis.
- Predict.

During Reading

- Make connections to self, the other texts, and the world.
- Visualize using senses.
- Question the text:
 - Question/Answer Relationship: What is **Right There** in the text?
 - What can the student **Think & Search**?
 - What is the author trying to say **To & Me** (inference)?
 - Write about an experience connected to text **On My Own**.
- Make inferences.
- Determine important ideas or themes.
- Synthesize.

After Reading

- Discuss.
- Sum it up.
- Retell.
- Respond.
- Extend through comparing versions of the texts, synthesizing the information using Venn diagrams.

Teachers assess the effectiveness of bridging literature in the classroom curriculum by checking the **availability** of books, discovering how much **time** is given for literature and reading, questioning and knowing the students' **interests, balancing** and **integrating** literature in the curriculum, evaluating students' **growth** as readers and writers, and **reflecting** how literature enhances students' learning.

By bridging religious or secular literature to Bible stories and themes, we as Lutheran educators can help students apply a Christian lens to the printed, and now electronic, page. Literature helps students connect with what is happening in their world and enhance what they are learning by internalizing their knowledge. As students focus their Christian lens on understanding, comprehending, and learning from literature, they make meaningful connections to the many facets of their lives.

References:

Kasten, W.C., Kristo, J.V., & McClure, A.A. (2005). *Living literature: Using children's literature to support reading and language arts*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Kiefer, B.Z. (2011). *Charlotte Huck's children's literature*. 10th ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

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