



Academic Initiatives for Biblical Literacy in Public Education



Presenter: Dr. W. J. Brown, Educational Specialist (Ed. S.)
Date: Friday, October 11, 2019
Event: Virginia Association of Teachers of English (VATE)
Conference
Theme: "Coming Alive"



Introduction

Academic Initiatives for Biblical Literacy in Public Education



Before I recently retired as a secondary English teacher after more than forty (40) years secondary public education, I was successful in imparting much information that challenged my students' abilities to think critically and analytically.



Introduction (continued)

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Oftentimes, as an secondary English teacher, however, I found myself filled with dismay as I encountered rampant illiteracy among the students during class discussions of the Hebrew Bible in connection to many other literary works in our culture.



Developing a “Quality” Education

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A well-structured high school curriculum with a meaningful content that is designed to promote rational and purposeful thought should include academic studies of the Hebrew Bible- whether students have formed personal religious beliefs or not.



Graduating Fully Literate Students

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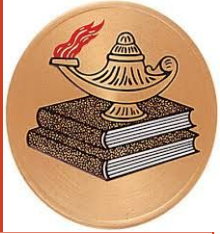
This lack of knowledge of the Hebrew Bible has left a void in the students' overall understanding of and appreciation for other literary works (especially the classics) that fully "educated" citizens in our society are expected to know. "Any American who does not possess the knowledge assumed in a piece he or she reads will in fact be illiterate." -Hirsch, E. D. (1987, *Cultural Literacy: What Every*



“I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all of this Book that you can by reason and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man...” -Abraham Lincoln

Developing Character Building

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I believe that a quality education for all students is foundational to personal and societal progress. In the attempt to evaluate ideas and assumptions, high school students should seek, find, examine, and understand truth, especially the timeless truths found in the Hebrew Bible.



Dispelling the Myths (cont.)

Recommended Reading:

Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law.

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED387390>



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“Organizations that span the ideological, religious, and political spectrum stand together as they make this a statement of consensus on current law regarding religion in public schools. Each organization professes a commitment to the freedom of religious practice and the separation of church and state that such freedom requires. The statement is devised to aid parents, educators, and students.”



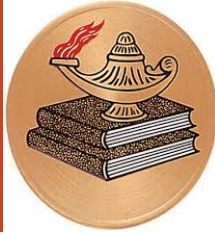
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“It offers a summary of current law on school prayer, including: official participation or encouragement of religious activities; teaching about religion; student assignments and religion; the distribution of religious literature; before and after school activities; religious persuasion versus harassment; the Equal Access Act; religious holidays; excusal from religiously-objectional lessons; teaching of values; student garb; and release time.”



Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools



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Across America, the consensus is that more religious studies, including the Hebrew Bible, are needed in public school curricula. Nevertheless, many Americans still hold onto the mistaken opinion that the Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s concerning prayer and devotional Bible-reading prohibit students from expressing their faith or reading the Bible in a public



Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools (cont.)

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FACT: The Supreme Court did not eliminate prayer or the Bible from public schools; it barred state-sponsored religious/devotional practices, including devotional use of the Bible by public-school officials . (Read: See “Religion in the Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law,” endorsed by 35 religious and religious-liberty organizations, and “The Bible and Public Schools: A First Amendment Guide” published by the First Amendment Center, 1999.)



Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools (cont.)

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Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools (cont.)

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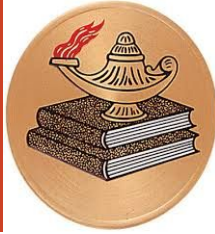


FACT: To help erase the confusion about the constitutionality of teaching *about* the Bible or religion in a public school setting, educators need to take the time to revisit the U.S. Supreme Court 1963 ruling in *Abington v. Schempp*. After explaining its decision for ruling against devotional teacher-led prayers and daily Bible readings that are not a part of a secular program of academic studies, the Court expressly stated:



Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools (cont.)

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“It might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment...” (U.S. Supreme Court 1963 ruling in *Abington v. Schempp*)



Dispelling the Myths about Religion, the Bible and Public Schools (cont.)

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Teaching the Bible as Literature

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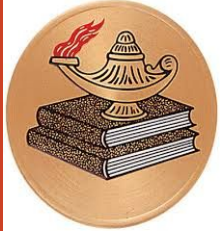
“First, teaching the Bible in public schools is important for students because, without knowledge of [the Bible](#), students can’t fully understand the English language, English literature, history, art, music or culture. For example, there are over 1,200 documented references to the Bible in Shakespeare’s 36 plays. If you don’t know the Bible, you really can’t understand Shakespeare. You can’t get past the first sentence of Herman Melville’s Moby Dick - “Call me Ishmael” - if you don’t understand who Ishmael was in the Bible”

(<https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/the-compelling-case-for-teaching-the-bible-in-public-schools>).



Teaching the Bible as Literature

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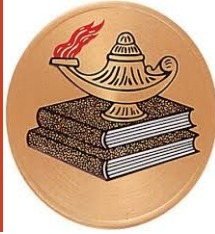
“The Bible is an ancient document that continues to shape the world around us. It has influenced not only American culture and history, but cultures and histories throughout the world. A Bible course that teaches students to read the Bible, to understand its development and transmission, and its effects on peoples and cultures will equip students with a deeper understanding of this foundational text and the cultures that produced it . (The Society of Biblical Literature, an academic society, founded in 1880, whose mission is to foster Biblical scholarship)



Bible Electives in Public Schools

(Source: The Society of Biblical Literature, an academic society, founded in 1880)

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“Bible electives are unlike other public-school courses in that many are being taught for the first time. Appropriate teaching materials are scarce, as are teachers with academic training in the subject. The risks of teachers imparting religious bias exist because of the lack of training and resources available to them. Despite these challenges, ...a well-taught Bible course can open students to understanding a familiar text in new ways and enrich their encounters with literature over a lifetime. The SBL actively seeks to assist teachers in learning to recognize and address the classroom issues that are unique to Bible



Bible Electives in Public Schools

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“Done right, courses will encourage critical inquiry among students, teach them to read a text closely (and to enjoy it!), and offer them an appreciation for how the Bible has affected politics, history, democracy, literature, and the arts.” (Visit the SBL website for more teacher resources at:

www.sbl-site.org/educational/teachingbible.aspx)



Teaching Bible Literature and History in Public Schools

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“Teach the Bible in public schools so that students can learn to better understand the world around them.” ([Chuck Stetson](#), Fox News, March 15, 2019)

Resources for Teaching Bible Electives in Public Schools:



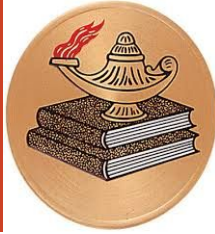
Academic Initiatives for Biblical Literacy (AIBL):
Custom Literature Lesson Plans (Secondary Education)
Bible Literacy Essay Writing Prompts /Sample Writing Outlines
Lessons Based upon Biblical and Western Literary Themes
Lesson Plans for Character/Values Based Initiatives





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Teaching Bible Literature and History in Public Schools

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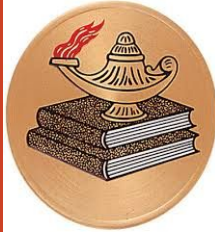


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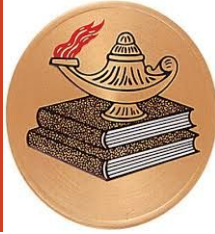


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Concerning the Hebrew **Bible**, the English Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge once stated, "For more than a thousand years, the Bible, collectively taken, has gone hand in hand with civilization, science, law-- , in short, with the moral and intellectual cultivation of the species, always supporting and often leading the way."

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