



English: Plot and Choices

What if studying plot explored our ability to choose?

Natalie was exploring plots and alternative endings in English over a series of lessons. She wanted the class to think about choices characters made and how these changed the plot, but she wanted to relate this to students' lives so that it was more relevant. She decided to use a Bible story in her literacy teaching as part of "traditional stories," selecting Esther as the character with a choice.

"I started with a short story I had created, telling it as far as the crucial decision point. Then the students completed the story, suggesting what choice was made and the consequences. We classified the different endings they suggested and listened to several. I told the rest of my original story, where the character had made a positive choice but it was difficult.

"I then told the story of Esther up to the point where Esther has to decide whether to help. I asked the students to predict possible endings, and then I read the rest of the story. This led on to a discussion about our freedom to choose and how making a good choice is not always the easiest option."

What's going on here?

Natalie **saw** her Christian faith as integral to all her teaching and saw literature as a place to explore big questions and focus on responsible choices.

She **engaged** students in actively thinking through possible endings to the story and reflecting on the wider implications and questions surrounding choice.

She **reshaped her practice** by choosing to frame learning in terms of thinking about choice; asking big questions about faith, life and values; and making connections between the Bible and literacy (English).

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Sometimes, behavior is blamed on our genes or our environment, and this can lead to the implicit or explicit assumption that “it’s not my fault.” Such an attitude leaves us with little hope. Without denying the influence of genetics or environment, Christian faith affirms that generally we are responsible for the decisions we make, though in some situations our choice and responsibility are reduced. Decisions can be made with God through prayer and with the help of others. This offers hope of making right choices with God’s help.

What difference does it make?


Natalie’s lesson raised awareness of an important issue rather than just leaving it in the background; this encouraged students to grapple with big questions. By using a Bible story in a literature class, she signaled that Bible stories have something to say in different contexts.

Where could we go from here?

Other issues that are implicit in literacy (English) can be brought to the fore; such as issues concerning character, which virtues the writer considers desirable, and what we, society, or the Bible hold up as desirable. How do we decide what a desirable trait in a literary character is?

Digging deeper

Throughout the Bible people are called to make right choices with God’s help. Ultimately, people are called to account before God for the choices they make, which assumes a degree of responsibility. If God forced people against their wills or if people had no freedom of choice, they would not be responsible.



Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will—his personal responsibility in the realm of faith

and morals. Albert Schweitzer

In society there is a way of thinking that sees people as determined by genetics, environment, and other factors and as having little responsibility for their decisions. Within the Christian faith there also is a doctrine, God's sovereignty ([Isaiah 40:22-23](#)), that can be misunderstood as having the same effect. Christians balance human responsibility for our choices with the sovereignty of God. If human responsibility is overemphasized, faith becomes living in our own strength. If God's sovereignty is overemphasized, our responsibility is lost. Traditionally Christians hold the two together: God is in charge, but we can make decisions and we will be judged by God for those decisions ([Matthew 25:34-36](#)). Charles Spurgeon was once asked if he could reconcile God's sovereignty and human responsibility. "I wouldn't try," he replied, "I never reconcile friends."

God never forces men to act against their wills. By workings of outward providence or of inward grace, the Lord may change men's minds, but He will not coerce a human being into thoughts, words, or actions. Walter J. Chantry



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