



English: Literature and Grace

What if a text were explored using the concept of grace?

Caroline was concerned about the mentality that doing the bare minimum was enough. She was also troubled by how often she heard the retort, “What’s in it for me?” Her class was studying *Jane Eyre*, and she decided she would explore the role of grace as an attribute and action in the novel.

“I decided to change the way I introduced the novel. I started by putting up some definitions of grace. We looked at grace as

- undeserved love, favor, goodness, or blessing;
- treating or speaking of people better than their behavior deserves;
- doing more than is expected and going beyond a contractual view of life that sees living only in terms of rights and doing things for rewards; and
- receiving something as free gift, unearned.

“I gave the students examples of grace in action and asked them to create their own example starting with ‘Grace is ...’:

- Grace is when someone borrows your bike and cleans it before they return it.
- Grace is when you have hurt someone and they are still nice to you.

“We went on to look at attitudes, actions, and events in the book that could be described as ‘grace,’ such as Jane’s gracious assessment of Blanche Ingram. We also looked at the character of Grace Poole and how her name and character create a certain level of dissonance.”

What's going on here?

Caroline **saw** her English lesson in terms of grace and how it affects attitudes and behavior.

She **engaged** her students by focusing on grace as a key idea and expanding their participation through them creating “ Grace is ...” examples.

Caroline **reshaped her practice** by framing the lesson with a key concept and by changing the way she introduced the session. She encouraged thinking by introducing an element of dissonance, contrasting the person of Grace Poole with her name.

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

Grace is an aspect of **love**, for it is about giving more love than is deserved, behaving better than expected. Grace is an attitude and action that goes beyond any contractual view of relationships and instead responds with generosity of spirit and behavior. This reflects God’s grace, for God does not deal in short measures or even a bare minimum of love. God forgives those who do not deserve it and bestows blessings beyond what people could earn. Grace holds out hope, for it is unearned, which can help to break negative cycles in relationships.

What difference does it make?

Grace is a much-neglected concept that could present students with a way of thinking about characters and events and stimulate them to review their own way of looking at life.

Where could we go from here?

Other key concepts could be used to explore texts: for example, the cycle of sin and brokenness, redemption, healing, and restoration could be examined.

Digging deeper

Grace is the free, undeserved love, goodness, help, and favor of God. Salvation is by grace (Ephesians 2:8); it is the gift of God and not something that is earned—no one is good enough for that. A champagne bottle being opened is a good image of grace, as is laughter. It is an outpouring of goodness that we did not earn or create. It is God's measure: full, packed down, and running over (Luke 6:38). It creates delight.

Laughter is the closest thing to the grace of God. Karl Barth

Grace means living in remembrance that all is gift. Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can a life of grace be lived and people changed.

Once more, never think that you can live to God by your own power or strength; but always look to and rely on him for assistance, yea, for all strength and grace. David Brainerd

The Christian life is joyous, grateful living—an attitude very different from just keeping a bunch of rules. Living a life of grace is the opposite of living life doing the bare minimum and of seeing life as a series of contracts where we only do what it is expected and no more. Grace produces an attitude of the heart, a state of mind, and a way of life.

Next: Loving Texts

What if reading were about learnin...



