

Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Social Science

Perspectives

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Statement of Purpose

Perspectives in Covenant Education is a journal regulated and published quarterly, in November, February, May, and August by the Protestant Reformed Teachers' Institute. The purpose of this magazine, in most general terms, is to advance the cause of distinctively Christian education as it is conceived in the Protestant Reformed community. More specifically, the magazine is intended to serve as an encouragement and an inducement toward individual scholarship, and a medium for the development of distinctive principles and methods of teaching. The journal is meant to be a vehicle of communication, not only within the profession, but within the Protestant Reformed community and within the Christian community in general.

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Perspectives in Covenant Education exists for the purpose of furthering the cause of Protestant Reformed Christian education. This principle therefore regulates the entire contents of the journal.

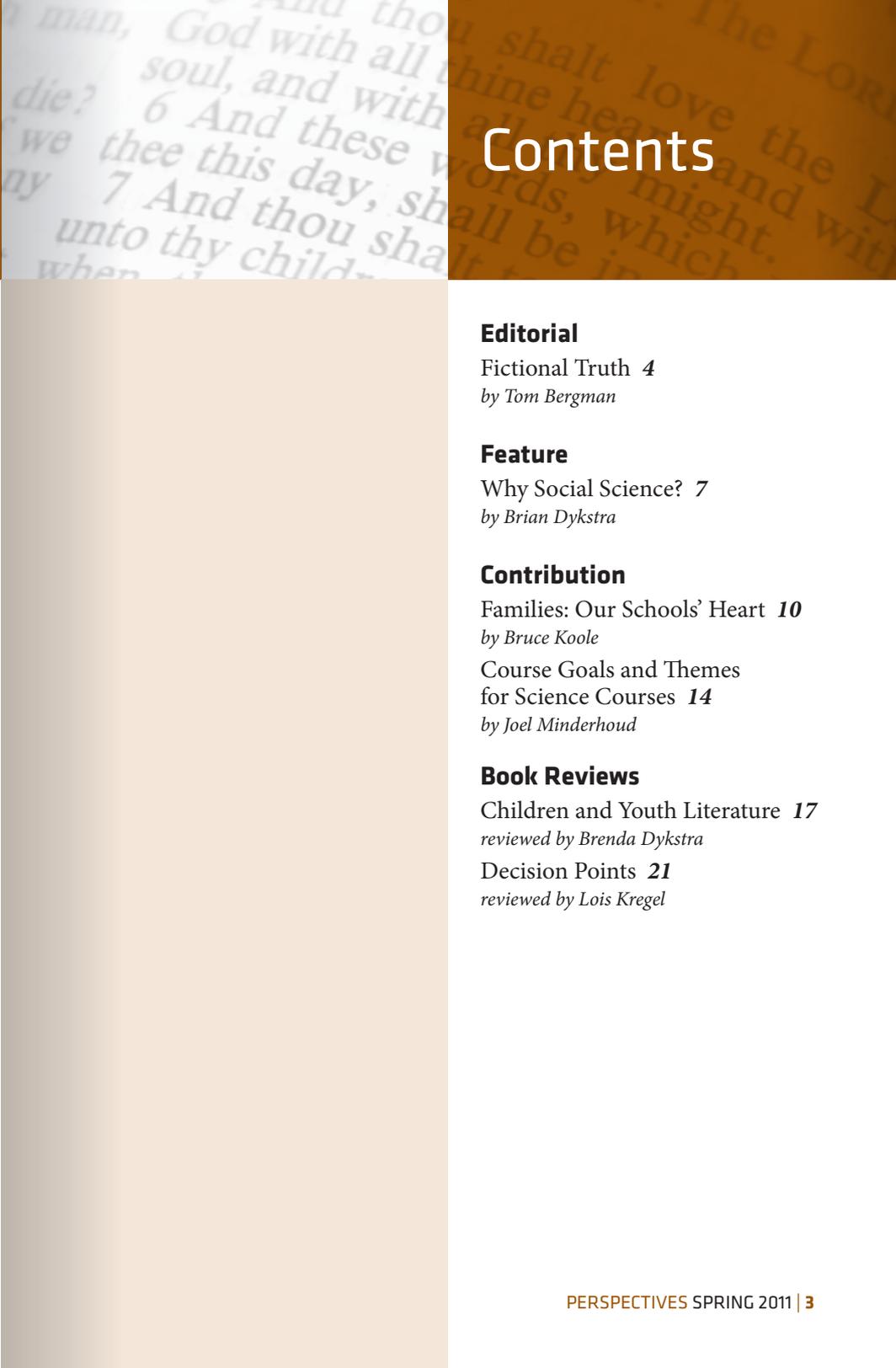
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Fictional Truth

Tom Bergman

Fiction is a major part of our school libraries. We have a great number of fiction books in our libraries for students of any age level. Some of the students whom I teach carry books in their backpacks for reading in their spare moments; these books are usually fiction. My own kindergartner and first-grader come home with children's books from their school's library, often fiction. We *intentionally* have these books available for the students in our Protestant Reformed schools. I, for one, am glad that we do. We have good reason for giving fiction a place in our schools; our students can use a dose of fiction now more than ever.

Fiction is not automatically worthwhile. The majority of fiction is rubbish, if not toxic waste. Seeing a child read fiction should not automatically put our minds at ease, as if we can breathe a sigh of relief: "It's better than watching television." It might be, but then again it might not be. The fiction we want our children and students reading should be good fiction, and the quality must be carefully monitored and modeled by adults.

By "good fiction," we do not limit ourselves to distinctly Christian fiction. Nor do we restrict our shelf space at school to distinctly Christian fiction. What makes fiction worthwhile? What makes it important? Dr. Bob De Smith, of Dordt College, proposes that fiction is important "because, put simply, it has the capacity to tell the truth. In fact, this is not a bad definition of fiction: imaginative writing that, while not literally true, nonetheless tells the truth (or can tell the truth)."¹ It seems paradoxical to say that fiction tells truth, but De Smith has a valid point. Fiction is "not literally true, nonetheless tells the truth." Consider our children's fiction section. The colorful characters within these stories often teach our children lessons about human nature and truthful living. Granted, we often

1 De Smith, Bob. "Faith in Fiction? Solzhenitsyn's *One Day* as a Practical Defense of Fiction." *Pro Rege* (March 2010), 9.

need to steer these lessons for the younger ones and cultivate discernment in the older ones so that the instruction is more accurate and biblical, but the closer these books are to the truth, the better.

Administered rightly, fiction is a good and healthy part of learning. Even beyond that, fictional literature is more important now than ever before. Movies and television, the silver screen and the small screen (that is not so small any more), comprise a visual juggernaut that we teachers, like it or not, have to contend against. Once in a while, I am impressed by the boldness of no small number of students who talk openly in the classroom about movies they've seen, and I have to remind them afresh about the classroom rules. Like it or not, movie viewing is common.

The principle objections to drama have been capably set forth by others.² We explore here the detrimental effect that movies especially have on young viewers and young *readers*. Recently I came across the astute observation of another professor at Dordt College. Dr. Mary Dengler writes, "Captivated by sound and visual images that construct and impose their reality on viewers, students mistake parody for reality and accept film adaptations for the work itself."³ She goes on to cite the example of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and a 2000 film version of it. In the film, Sir Thomas is "recast as a nefarious rapist," redefining the author's intended conflict, "as if the original struggle were insignificant." Austen's work of fiction was not merely adapted for the screen; enormous distortions changed its very essence.

The same is true for Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* and a 1975 film version of it. The main characters in the movie were drastically altered from how Kipling portrayed them. The worst culprit of all is Disney. What story hasn't Disney wrecked, ruined, twisted, subverted, and flipped upside down? Based on my reading of the stories and others' accounts of the movies, Disney's *Robin Hood* is not true to Howard Pyle's book *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, Disney's *Little Mermaid* has striking differences compared to Hans Christian Andersen's book *The Little Mermaid*, and likewise for Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures*

² See the excellent *Standard Bearer* editorials by Prof. Dykstra from Dec. 15, 2004 to Feb. 1, 2005. Find them at www.rfpa.org.

³ Dengler, Mary. "A Reformed Defense of Literature: An Apology for Literature's Place in Christian Higher Education." *Pro Rege* (June 2007), 17.

in *Wonderland*, and many more (don't even get me started on Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*). I think I might even cry and lock myself in a room for days if I ever found out what screenwriters and directors have done to Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*—did Disney mutilate this one, too?

Of course, the quintessential example is Disney's treatment of Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Now, *Hunchback* has its share of gore and violence; it's not a book to hastily recommend, and Disney obviously had to change something in order to make it more palatable for Disney audiences. But if you've seen the Disney version, you probably think that Esmeralda marries the captain and they live happily ever after. Um, no. Esmeralda gets hanged, yup, hanged—and then Quasimodo goes by her grave until he dies, too.

Yes, it is a gruesome ending, but Disney's lie is of greater concern. The movie viewer is not forewarned that the film is only loosely based on the book—that it in fact “rewrites” the book—so that Hugo's original purpose and the lessons about humanity are erased and reinvented, all without warning. This is a reprehensible aspect of movies and television that prompts Dr. Dengler to say, “Students need literary works as balancing correctives.”⁴

In our Christian schools, our students too can benefit from the reading of fiction. They should read some fiction *because* of the profit in it. To paraphrase De Smith, “Fiction has the capacity to tell truth.” And fiction can do so by means of characters, places, and situations that we could otherwise never be or be in. During these days of so much visual media, our schools need to continue endorsing wholesome use of fiction, more so now than ever before. Take advantage of the book reviews in many issues of *Perspectives*. The *Beacon Lights* and the *Standard Bearer* will also review fiction on occasion. So, read on!—for enjoyment and profit.

4 Ibid.

Why Social Science?

Brian Dykstra

Social science, a combination of geography, history, and economics, is a relative newcomer to the curriculum of our Protestant Reformed grade schools. Some of our parents and teachers wonder whether social science is nothing more than a bad marriage of subjects which used to be taught separately. Have we lost something valuable for our children by teaching them social science instead of teaching them geography and history? Now that we have social science instead of geography and history, is there a Reformed view on this subject to present to our children?

My perspective on this topic is that of a long-time fifth-grade teacher. When I began teaching back in the early 1980s, most of our schools followed the common practice of the day. American geography and history were taught as separate classes in fifth grade, and world geography and history were taught in sixth. The junior high would then study American and world history in greater detail with geography often being dropped so science could be taught. I remember thinking that “world” as applied to history and geography instruction back then was not the proper adjective. Students learned about the Middle East, ancient empires, and Europe. Very little, if anything, was done with Africa, Asia, and South America.

I was disappointed when told I would no longer be teaching American history because social science would take its place. I enjoyed teaching American history. Also, the new textbook given to me to teach came in three sections: the fundamentals of geography, Canada and the United States, and Latin America. However, no subject was given much in-depth study. For example, the American Civil War, a period filled with fascinating characters and events, received a scant eleven sentences of text!

There was wisdom, I thought, in giving our children a double dose of American history, fifth grade and junior high. After all, God placed us here, in the

United States. To know how to live as God's servants in this nation requires us to know her history. What did our leaders decide to do when the United States faced issues and challenges? What should we, as God's servants, think about the decisions made and the policies adopted?

The world has changed. We should no longer focus nearly exclusively on our own national or cultural history. Our children would benefit from a more global perspective. Our Savior returns, even now. The nations of the world are becoming more united, economically and politically, as God prepares to reveal the anti-Christ.

Here are two examples of the growing unity of the nations of the world. When I was young, finding a "Made in the USA" label was easy. In my travels around the Grand Rapids area I used to pass large factories surrounded by massive parking lots which were filled with workers' cars. In our own fair city, little Grand Rapids, Michigan, there were many thousands of jobs making and assembling various car parts, refrigerators, and furniture. Much of what we bought came from our own nation's resources, were designed here, and were made here. Now the resources used to make things and the products we purchase come from Asia and Mexico though much of the design work is still done in the United States. The products on our stores' shelves have an international story to tell.

Recently off the coast of Japan, God moved the earth and stirred the mighty deep of the ocean. A portion of the economic life of Japan halts, and after a few weeks we read in our newspapers of factories in the United States shutting down because of the disruption of product supply lines. The world is becoming one. As Christians we now need a more global perspective.

How can social science be taught from a Reformed viewpoint? Today's textbooks do not present a Reformed outlook so they don't help us here. There are not very many colleges and universities which are known for their conservative position on social issues, and this is where teachers are trained. The realm of education in our society is dominated by liberal thinking. Textbook publishers know their audience and publish what will produce the greatest volume of sales. Publishers cater to a largely liberal market. As long as we adults point out to our children and students the bias of these textbooks and the reason for this bias, these texts can be useful to us. It's a debatable issue, but I think our students can benefit from learning why the world thinks as it does.

Since the textbooks and publisher-provided materials do not present a Reformed world-view, it is up to us teachers to supplement the textbooks. There are

different ways to accomplish the goal of teaching social studies in a Reformed way. Different methods will be needed because although there are similarities in our schools, there are always differences, too.

Here's what I've tried. Although I use the publisher's textbook, I do not use the materials (study guides, activity sheets, tests, etc.) they provide. I make my own study materials, quizzes, and tests. Who knows our students better, we teachers in the classroom or some educational consultant in a cubicle in a skyscraper in Chicago? I understand very well that preparing these materials consumes a vast quantity of time, and you can look a bit silly when you don't notice typos or other mistakes before you hand out the "finished" materials, but it should be done.

As an example, the tests I make for Social Studies end with an essay section. The first question of this section is based on a classroom discussion we have had on a biblical topic related in some way to what we have just studied.

The section of our textbook about Latin America is divided into six chapters. Unfortunately, each chapter has a similar rhythm to it. The book usually focuses on the struggles of the poor and the impact man has had on the environment. The poor of Latin America have suffered, especially during times of warfare, and man appears to foul his own nest. (These are recurring themes in the news as well.)

I use these six chapters on Latin America as an opportunity to teach students about the four horsemen of Revelation 6. For the first chapter we discuss a general outline of the book of Revelation and present an overall picture of the four horses. For the next four chapters we focus on the white, red, black, and pale horses in turn. For the last chapter we discuss Proverbs 30:8–9, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

The world becomes more unified as our Lord's return nears. Social studies can help our students develop a more global perspective. As long as our high schools and junior highs continue to build on the basic foundation of material started in the middle elementary grades, I believe our students can learn what is necessary for them to develop a Christian perspective on world events. May all of us involved in our schools work together so our children are able to take their places in our congregations and in society as servants of their great King.

Families: Our Schools' Heart

Bruce Koole

The covenantal family is the heart of our schools. The importance of family is revealed by the New Testament, where grace developed the group of people who function as father, mother, and child. The wicked Greeks and Romans lived such immoral lives that the word “family,” as we define it, did not exist. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit established churches where parents had their children baptized.

Wicked Oriental Culture

The same situation appears in the Old Testament. The ancient cultures sinned so greatly that they almost squelched any idea of a family. At first appearance the Hebrew words themselves reflect this reality and seem to show that the “family,” as we conceive of it, did not exist.

Lost in unbelieving worship of idols, tempted by the devil to live wickedly, and sovereignly directed by God to be reprobate in the way of their sins, nearly all the Oriental world had no family. Spiritually the whole world was dark, except for Canaan.

Women were often of less value than goats and camels. A female was used for primarily three purposes: first, to bring wealth into a family when she and her dowry moved into her husband's tent; second, to bear, wean, and raise up male offspring that would continue the family name; and, third, to cement peace in foreign negotiations between warring nations as one-half of an arranged marriage.

Love, as defined by getting the gifts of jewelry, perfumes, and lotions as well as experiencing the happy feelings when two hearts felt glued together as one, was accidental and incidental. Looking at Scripture, it does not seem that Esau, Ishmael, or Esther had a great love for their spouses. Outside of Christ there is only curses and hatred.

Old Testament Meanings of Family

The Hebrew word for “family” occurs about 300 times in the Old Testament. While it twice refers to “kinds of animals,” the rest refer to humans as “family, families, or kindreds.” Family means “a clan as a sub-group of a larger tribe.”

An Old Testament tribe was divided into important families and each family was further subdivided into main houses. Each house was divided into individuals, or nuclear families.

This is seen just after the deadly battle at Ai, when Joshua cast the lots that eventually fell on Achan. In Joshua 6:16-18, the tribe of Judah is divided into families. The family of the Zarahites is divided into different households. The household of Zabdi was divided into individuals. Achan was the individual chosen by lot.

Thus an Old Testament family was a very large clan of people that descended from a famous individual. It focuses on the ancestry and genealogy of a Hebrew, looking at the last name of the person under consideration. This is seen in Luke 2 when Joseph and Mary go pay taxes in tiny Bethlehem, where David their ancestor was born. They were of David’s family—not of Boaz, Uzziah, or Hezekiah.

The Hebrew word used for “family” did not literally mean that the husband, wife, and child work together in love for the benefit of each other. As the doctrine of marriage developed, it was not unexpected that sinner-saints like Abraham, Jacob, Judah, David, Solomon and many others begat children adulterously. Because of stiff necks, Moses allowed the Jews to write a bill of divorcement, so that their wives could be honorably treated, although from Creation this was not so.

Then especially, grace worked to strengthen and develop the covenant family, as God walked mercifully by them in their sins. Grace used the sin of polygamy and divorce to provide food and drink for children and women.

Furthermore, there were many heroes of faith who faithfully lived with and loved one spouse, such as Isaac, Joseph, and Isaiah.

Scriptural Development of Family

The best Old Testament description of a nuclear family is found in the institution of the Passover feast in Exodus 12:3ff: “Israel ... shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their father, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls.” Each man of a house needed to separate a perfect male lamb from the flock on the tenth day of the month. He

killed the lamb on the evening of the fourteenth day and spread the blood on the doorposts.

Notice that the rule was one lamb per household. Depending on who was living with whom, it was possible that Achan's father Zabdi could have taken the Passover lamb and killed it for himself and all his married sons. If a household was too small in size and could not eat their share of the lamb meat, then neighbors were commanded to share with each other. At other times the household was the nuclear family. For example, Elkanah, Hannah, Peninah, and their children sacrificed and ate the Passover lamb. Elkanah's father and brothers did not worship with the family.

The doctrine is clear—the family is united when they worship Christ crucified. Families are unified when they worship together on Sunday, send the children to catechism, and finish meal-times with devotions. Skip an event and family life suffers.

To be blessed in Christ is to hear him in the preaching on the Sabbath day when we listen gladly, just as a wife listens for the voice of her husband returning from work. Our relationship to Christ as church is similar to the relationship between wife and husband as explained by Ephesians 5:22–32.

Family bonds are not primarily forged by travelling together on family vacations, walking on shopping trips, flitting around on hunting excursions, setting up date nights, playing board games on a family night, attending sporting events, or inviting company over. There is a time for these events, and they do help bind families together, but only after dwelling in pews under the preaching of the blood-atonement, laboring at catechetical memorizing, and beseeching heaven's royal Sovereign for help. True indeed is the old watchword, "The family that prays together, stays together."

The meaning of a nuclear family is seen quite clearly in Genesis 12:3, when God says to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Here "family" has reference to that all nations, tribes, tongues, and clans of the earth will be blessed, and not primarily nuclear families. Yet, clans have mothers and children. This is a covenantal passage.

Soon it would be very clearly revealed to Abraham in Genesis 17:7 that God's covenant of friendship was with believers and their seed, to parents and their children with this revelation from Galatians 3:16: Abraham would bless all the families of the earth by and in his seed, Christ. In Christ there is love and grace.

Our relationship to Christ develops to one of loving and being loved as ex-

plained by the Song of Solomon. Randomly pick nearly any verse from the eight chapters of that book of love, and see how great is the love that Christ expresses for his church. This book shows that indeed do gold, frankincense, and myrrh, as well as having two hearts fused together by neediness, help make a marriage full. A marriage is complete as long as husband and wife are married together in the love of Christ. They are a family.

Covenantally, though, every married couple desires children. Every marriage knows the creation ordinance to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the earth. Therefore, Abraham and Sarah yearned for some 60 years to have a child. Isaac and Rebekah prayed for twenty years before God gave them Jacob. Tamar desired covenant seed and used human methods of trickery to conceive covenant offspring. Naomi considered herself finally redeemed after Ruth gave birth to Obed. Hannah silently wept with great bitterness, praying that her womb be not barren any longer. Zechariah and Elizabeth sought for more than five decades to have a child. These six wanted a male, the promised Messiah who would save his people from their sins. Jehovah's answer was covenantal—Yes!

Our Responsibilities

Scripture shows the importance of parents, and mothers especially, teaching children to serve Jehovah from the time they are very young. The teachings of Hannah and Jochebed nurtured great faith in their sons for the short five years or so that they had to raise them.

Today is no different. We parents have a great duty in these very wicked times to teach our children the faith of Scriptures. Mothers teach simple prayers at bedtimes while fathers read Bible stories. Mothers teach Bible verses at breakfast while fathers sing Psalms aloud at suppertime. Mothers help with Sunday school lessons while fathers help with catechism lessons. Both make sure that their children attend church and sit attentively during the worship service.

What results is that young children begin to play church outside in the summer sun where all the neighbors have their consciences pricked by hearing those tiny sopranos sing “Jesus Loves Me” and “The Lord’s My Shepherd.”

As the children age, mothers haul their kids down to the library while fathers make sure to read aloud to their children. Over time parents morph into Bible, math, history, and science tutors, reviewing for tests and quizzes with their children as needed. Where environment proves again to fathers that the federal headship of Adam has produced stock mirroring the same fallen nature of their

progenitors, corrective and humble action via the long arm of the law is applied, in addition to the fact that, where needed, properly ordered summits between educator and offspring-originator are arranged as needed.

As children age, parents make it their solemn duty to see to that their most precious treasure is not only enrolled in good Christian schools for thirteen years, from Kindergarten through the twelfth grade, but also is instructed according to the demand of the covenant. They double-check the teacher's work; is every subject taught covenantally?

Our schools could not function without the hard sweat of the parents, especially the mothers, for the spiritual welfare of their children from infancy to age eighteen. Parents are the driving motivation, the heartbeat, that keeps our school functioning. May God give us his grace to keep them pounding.

Contribution

Course Goals and Themes for Science Courses

Joel Minderhoud

Goals:

1. To know how God reveals himself to us in the creation as studied in each particular topic/unit

To develop our knowledge of God (contemplate the invisible things of God)
Romans 1:20; Belgic Confession, Art. 2

- a. To see the attributes of God displayed in the creation
- b. To see how the earthly is a picture of the heavenly

2. To enable the students to use and care for the creation
 - a. To encourage students to use the creation as stewards of God (Genesis 1:28, Psalm 8)
 - b. To encourage the students to use and develop the creation as citizens of the kingdom of God for the cause of the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33; Matthew 25; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 123,124,125; Luke 12:35-38,42)

3. To guide the students to develop a Reformed perspective or world-and-life view on the creation
 - a. See that God created all things in six literal days out of nothing (Genesis 1,2; Col 1:16,17; Psalm 33:6,9; Hebrews 11:3; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 26; Belgic Confession, Art. 12)
 - b. See how God governs and upholds all things (Belgic Confession, Art. 12, 13; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 27, 28)
 - c. See how sin affects the creation and brings sickness/death/corrosion (Genesis 3:17-19; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:19-22)
 - d. See the judgments of God and the return of Christ in the natural calamities (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6)
 - e. See how this present creation will be destroyed at the end of time (II Peter 3:7, 10, 13; Belgic Confession, Art. 37)
 - f. See the organic view of the covenant; that it includes the creation—creation will be redeemed and delivered from the effects of sin at the end of all things (Gen. 9:9-17; Romans 8:19-22; Col. 1:20)
 - g. Recognize the errors of the world and the ungodly perspectives on the creation (humanism: evolutionism, naturalism, and environmentalism) and critically evaluate them (I John 4:1)
 - h. Enable students to articulate a proper Reformed perspective on the use and development of the creation

4. To equip the students with an understanding of the creation and with the technical skills necessary to live in this creation as God's friend-servants
 - a. To develop analytical thinking and problem-solving skills
 - b. To develop laboratory skills

- c. To develop laboratory report writing skills
 - d. To develop the skills of observation and reasoning
 - e. To develop communication skills—written, oral, presentation skills
 - f. To equip the students with the skills and understandings of the world around them and to equip them to use these skills in “real-life” applications
 - g. To learn to relate the microscopic to the macroscopic
 - h. To develop skills and abilities with technology—computer based laboratory equipment, software programs, internet, word-processing
 - i. To learn how to use this knowledge for the cause of God’s kingdom
5. To develop the students into independent, life-long learners
- a. To develop independent thinking and problem-solving skills
 - b. To develop critical thinking skills
 - c. To develop an ability to critically analyze and discern worldly perspectives
 - d. To articulate a Reformed perspective on the creation
6. To develop an ability to work with others in a group or laboratory setting
- a. Develop organization skills
 - b. Develop the ability to work together
 - c. Recognize the good ideas, abilities, and contributions of others
7. To develop proper Christian and scientific work ethic
- a. Work honestly and fairly
 - b. Be organized
 - c. Develop observation skills
 - d. Be neat and thorough
 - e. Develop reasoning and conclusion skills based on observations
 - f. Develop a conscientious, hard-working attitude
8. To enjoy the creation
- a. To develop an awe of God’s creation
 - b. To inspire students to look at the creation from a fresh and exciting perspective

- c. To develop a joy of learning about God's creation
 - d. To develop an enjoyment of the beauty of the creation.
9. To guide the students into a clear understanding of Protestant Reformed Christian education, its value, and the students' responsibilities with such an education

Book Reviews

Children and Youth Literature

Brenda Dykstra

Mo Willems

Caldecott Honor award-winning, Emmy award-winning, Sesame Street animator, creator of cable television's *Sheep in the City*, dynamic children's illustrator of more than thirty books, Mo Willems certainly reaches kids. As an adult, it was at times difficult for me to see why kids love the Elephant and Piggie stories or his other books so very, very much; evidently, Willems' talking bubbles and animated characters effectively address the issues and the hearts for this young age group.

Again, the caution is for discernment because characters react sometimes with oblate anger, tempers, and tantrums. Though typical of kids who in their whiny, self-centered, greedy mannerisms act in this way, these issues must be discussed with little readers who need to be taught that a child of the King ought not to act like this. I also viewed Mo Willems' book about characters who are potty training, of which the title is too crass to even add to the *Perspectives*, funny as it may be. Use your judgment here.

But, Mo Willems' books are top-selling, accolade-winning, modern books for very young children. Though very fun reading, clear discussion opportunities scream for biblical character development for a small, youthful child of God. *The New York Times* raves, "Mo Willems is the biggest talent to emerge in the '00's." *The Bulletin* adds, "These books will easily take their place alongside of Seuss and Eastman as classics in the beginning-reader genre." And for the parent believer this ought to be a cautionary red-flag, even though the author's ability to reach children with his literature is certainly commendable and strikingly noteworthy.

Cat the Cat, Who Is That? by Mo Willems, Harper Collins, 2010. Recommended ages: 2-5 years.

Exuberant cat tells the readers all about her friends. Will she stay friends with even the odd-looking alien?

Response: A book designed for tots and young preschoolers, the book draws this audience in for a fun time with its bright pictures and very simple language, consonant sounds, and rhyme. Glowing reviews of these books are available from Baby Einstein creators and much more. The spunky feline is a character to remember certainly, though this reviewer truthfully found these books quite mundane and almost a bit too silly. But kids love Mo Willems pictures and characters, and no questionable issues surfaced. Other books are available in this series as well.

Elephant and Piggie Books: *My Friend is Sad, I Love My New Toy, Elephants Cannot Dance, Are You Ready to Play Outside?*, and *Watch Me Throw the Ball*, by Mo Willems. Recommended ages: 2-6 years.

Meet two best friends Elephant and Piggie who really care about each other. The two learn about what it means to have differences, but still be close pals. Their adventures include learning to share, to be friends, to play, to enjoy clouds or rain, and more.

Response: One book in this series, *Elephants Cannot Dance*, though really centered on attempting to succeed, had obvious issues, as the title depicts. I also found an unnecessary blurb when the characters were upset, which wasn't really necessary either. It's indisputable—kids love the characters, drawings, and simple text. Plots are not earth-shaking, but the word bubbles and simple everyday adventures draw the youthful reader. Some of these are definitely worth a look, too. Enjoy!

Caldecott Honor award: *Knuffle Bunny*

Knuffle Bunny (2008), *Knuffle Bunny, Too* (2009), and *Knuffle Bunny Free* (2010), by Mo Willems. Recommended ages: 2-5 years.

A toy teddy, Knuffle Bunny, develops into a close friend for young Trixie. Her mother and father go to great lengths, even crossing town in the middle of the night, to get her toy friend. Will she continue to hang on to it forever? Will she ever learn to share? What will make Trixie grow up a bit, and will she get rid of her Knuffle Bunny?

Response: Again, children just LOVE these texts. The drawings are hand-drawn in ink, then colored and composited in digital collage. The first, *Knuffle Bunny*, even sports a Caldecott honor. Adults will enjoy looking at the artistic collages that tell the tale. It is interesting to note that the lovable, fun characters are actually real people present in author Mo Willems' life. And developmentally egocentric children, as they undoubtedly are at ages 2-5, will appreciate Trixie's adventures with her Knuffle Bunny. No crass words present, but again, the opportunity to discuss her friend is an open door for very simple talk about Jesus as the MOST important thing in life.

Edwina, the Dinosaur Who Didn't Know She was Extinct, by Mo Willems, Hyperion Books, 2006. Recommended ages: 3-6 years.

How can she be extinct? The dinosaur Edwina is everyone's best friend, from teacher and student to entire neighborhood, bringing yummy chocolate chip cookies all the time! Until student Reginald Von Hoobie-Doobie sets out to prove differently—that Edwina has to go! Can Edwina soften his heart enough for him to accept her home-made cookies? Or will he succeed in proving that dinosaurs are really gone forever?

Response: The cartoon drawings of Willems bring this book to life. Children will want Edwina to win out. But the issues of the creation and the flood are inevitably present as child antagonist Reginald Von Hoobie Doobie explains their death and end. Though this book is definitely meant for a younger child and one can avoid this somewhat, some children will obviously have the aptitude and inquisitive nature to understand more. Though the story is fun and captivating, be ready to tackle such issues.

Newbery Award (1997)

Out of the Dust, by Karen Hesse, 227 pages. Grade level: 6th-8th grade

Dust raged the farm country of Oklahoma state in 1934. Billie Jo, a 14-year old only child, lives farm life in this forlorn wilderness with her mother and father. The Great Depression ravaged America as Franklin D. Roosevelt passionately worked to aide the farmers. Very much like her father, though innately musical like her ballroom pianist mother, Billie Jo attempts to understand life and its hardship.

Her kindred spirit father, however, makes a dreadful mistake leaving a kerosene lamp by the fire. As the fire ignited, it devoured much in its path, horrifically wounding and eventually killing Billie Jo's pregnant mother, and burning her hands. Billie Jo's retaliation against her father is evident as she runs from home to California for 3 days. She returns, however, to her father, who has found a new girlfriend named Louise.

But will Billie Jo ever find relief and be "out of this dust?" Is acceptance of Louise in the future, or will Billie Jo choose to keep her anger?

Response: This novel is written in poetic free-verse. Its writing is certainly unique. The lengthy, noteworthy criterion of Newbery award is clearly met. The characters are colorfully described and alive. The plot line, though not always earth-shaking, is the tale of a journey to acceptance in youth.

I found the tale to be very enjoyable, and because it was a different writing style, it was worth the read simply to observe varying English language use. That being said, that doesn't mean the young teens are going to enjoy it because many at this age prefer "easy reads."

But the issues are worth contemplation for youths, and abundant conversation ideas for the parent or teacher are present. Is Billie Jo's anger justified? Are Billie Jo's actions befitting of a child of the King—why or why not? Could she even be a Christian? Take a look!

Children and Youth Literature

Lois Kregel

Decision Points, by George W. Bush; Crown Publishers, 2010; 477 pages.

Decision Points is the memoirs of George W. Bush. It is not in any sense an autobiography, because it tells of his life only up to the end of his second term as President, and only how he came to make the key decisions of those years. He stresses the fact that those he made as President were made in consultation with his many advisors.

What motivated Bush to write his memoirs? He states that there were many who urged him to write them. He adds that he wanted to show just what went into the decision-making process while he was President. Besides, he was paid a million dollars for the right to publish this book. That is not stated as one of his motives, however.

Nevertheless, the book gives a clear picture of what kind of a man George W. Bush was.

He begins with his early years at home in Midland, Texas. His father had taken a job with an oil service company there because he wanted to start at the bottom rung of the corporate ladder. He lived with his parents, George and Barbara, in a small apartment, where his parents loved and disciplined him like any other well brought up American boy, even washing his mouth out with soap when he used smutty language. He thought the world of them, although he tried their patience, to the extent that, as he says, he gave his mother her gray hairs.

He went to high school in Andover, Massachusetts, reluctantly; it was a family tradition. He went to Yale gladly, and then to Harvard for a business degree. He returned to Midland, and shortly thereafter he met Laura Welch; it was love at first sight for both of them, and they were married soon after.

They both wanted children, but when they didn't immediately find their wishes fulfilled, they opted for adoption, preferably twins. Then Laura became

pregnant—with twins. Bush called their birth the most exciting moment of his life. They named them Barbara and Jenna, after both grandmothers.

George had become a habitual drinker, and sometimes made some rather vulgar and foolish statements when he had had a little too much alcohol. He resolved to quit altogether, and found it harder than he had expected. He persisted, however, to his credit, and never had another drop, no matter what the circumstances, or in what company he was. It was an important decision. He tells about meeting Billy Graham, and of coming to think that the way to become a better person was to embrace Christ. He started attending a Bible study; I think he really thought that this was the way to become a Christian. I do not read anything about sorrow for sin, the cross, forgiveness. I do not say that Bush did not believe these things: I simply do not read of them in connection with his becoming a Christian. For him it was another decision point.

Of the rest of his early life he tells, too: his governorship of Texas for two terms, his decision to run for president, with the close race that eventually was decided by the Supreme Court, and how he chose his cabinet and other advisors. You know of all of these events, but Bush takes you behind the scenes, to show you how he came to make all of these choices.

His presidency was tumultuous, primarily because of the attack of September 11, which forever changed our complacent lives, and our naïveté about how some of the nations of the world regard us. Then there was our involvement in Afghanistan, in trying to root out the hotbeds of terrorism, and our war with Iraq, based in part on the faulty intelligence that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. Other nations had the same intelligence, but we were the only one to act on it, a decision for which Bush was roundly criticized. It was probably his most important decision point, but as Bush points out, was made together with his trusted staff. About the failure to find WMD, as they came to be called, Bush writes, “While the world was undoubtedly safer with Saddam gone, the reality was that I had sent troops into combat based in large part on intelligence that proved to be false. No one was more shocked or angry than I was when we didn’t find the weapons. I had a sickening feeling every time I thought about it. I still do.”

There were other decision points, such as one of the first he made as President, in regard to stem cell research. Here he took the high road, concluding that it would be experimenting with human life.

It is much too soon to judge George W. Bush as a strong or weak president.

History will do that in due time. For now, I found it interesting to read about the reasons for the decisions he made. Perhaps you will, too.

One question kept coming back to me as I read this book. Is it possible in today's world to be a Bible-believing, professing Christian and be President? Even though such a person would probably not be elected, could he, should he, try?

Perspectives in Covenant Education

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