



Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Trinity as a Model

Perspectives

IN COVENANT EDUCATION

Perspectives Staff

Tom Bergman
Alex Kalsbeek
Sarah Koole
David Mahtani

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.

Editorial Office

Perspectives in Covenant Education
c/o Tom Bergman
1401 Ferndale Avenue, SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534
thomas.bergman@att.net

Business Manager

Heidi Haveman
1745 Westwood Court
Jenison, MI 49428

Editorial Policy

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.

Perspectives in Covenant Education will publish any article written by a teacher, parent, or friend of Protestant Reformed education, provided the article is in harmony with the stated purpose of the magazine. The journal will publish articles whether theoretical or practical. All manuscripts must be signed and all authors are solely responsible for the contents of their articles.

Subscription Policy

Subscription price: \$7.00 per year (\$8.00 US foreign). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your former address and zip code.

Reprint Policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided that a) such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) proper acknowledgment is made; c) a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.



Contents

Editorial

Respect Reformed **4**

by Tom Bergman

Features

The Trinity as a Model for Teaching
in the Christian School **6**

by Scott Van Uffelen

Contribution

Children's Literature: What
Happened? **11**

by Rick Mingerink

Principals Corner:
Teacher Evaluations **17**

by Jim Regnerus

Book Reviews

Children and Youth Literature **19**

reviewed by Sarah Mowery

Respect Reformed

Tom Bergman

An education professor once told his class an anecdote about his experiences as a teacher. Substituting for another teacher one day, he was confronted by an unruly girl in the class who challenged him, “You don’t like me, do you?” His response was, “Try giving me something to like.”

Although student and teacher used the word “like,” they were really talking about respect. His point to her was that she ought to earn his respect. Implicitly, he was also saying that he would also strive to earn her respect as well. Instead of sparking the confrontation she may have expected, the girl ended up on fairly good terms with him. In her eyes, the teacher had earned her respect.

Respect should be one of the hallmarks of the classroom. Students should have proper respect for textbooks and desks, respect for the dignity and reputations of classmates, and respect for their own appearance and dress. Besides these objects of their respect, the students must also respect their teachers as objects worthy of honor.

Disrespect is ugly and frightening. From the milder instances of disrespect (such as rude interruptions) to the more severe problems (such as lying to a teacher), disrespect always leaves an unpleasant impression. What makes disrespect so frightening is the glimpse that it gives into the heart of the child who said or did such a thing. How could children of light be so disrespectful? Although we know the answer to the question, nevertheless the old man of sin that still dwells within us all is very sobering to behold.

Let’s assess the state of our homes and classrooms. To what degree do we demand respect? To what extent do we tolerate disrespect? In recent years our journal has spotlighted the casual attitudes of students, more of a step toward disrespect than toward honor. Perhaps we make excuses for our past shortcomings by citing the fact that it is often difficult to define what is within-the-bounds exuberance and what is out-of-bonds disrespect. Maybe our immediate thought

is look to the future with a renewed enthusiasm to *be* a truly respectful parent or teacher.

Respect indeed can and should be earned. But if this is all—respect must be earned, period—then the subject of tolerating disrespect becomes a muddy one. If the students don't respect the teacher, then the teacher must be faulted for failing to earn their respect. The problem then would lie solely with the teacher. Instead of demanding respect or tolerating disrespect, the teacher would have to focus entirely on making his own conduct more respectable.

Being more respectable is good and laudable, but also consider why we demand respect at all—what it is and why WE want OUR students to respect their teachers. As with most educational issues that come under our scrutiny as Protestant Reformed teachers, our reasons for demanding respect and not tolerating disrespect are radically different than elsewhere. Respect is *respect*: a *view*, how we *look* at God and those whom God places over us. The darkness of unbelief fosters a view of others marked by cold, cruel pride. In the light of the glorious gospel of the Reformed faith, we have a new view. We demand respect because we are training our children to use the fifth commandment as a guide for esteeming and honoring parents—and teachers *in loco parentis*—as part of the covenant life and calling of members of God's covenant.

This does indeed mean that students must honor their teachers for the Lord's sake, not on the basis of the teacher's worthiness or respectability (although the godly teacher ought to pray and strive daily for his own respectable conduct). We must make this demand, not conditioned upon the basis of the teacher's worthiness, but with the fifth commandment (and the principle of the second table of the law) as the ground.

The teacher who tries to demand respect but is willing to tolerate disrespect will not be successful; even the world has an inkling about the career trajectory of such a teacher. More significantly, our concern is that the teacher who is willing to tolerate disrespect is neglecting his duty to teach children of the covenant the demands of the Christian life.

Resolve to renew our efforts to teach the students about a respect that has been formed by God's grace. Let biblical principles be our guide. Do not allow students to act as though they own the place; do teach them respect for the property that belong to the school society and is managed by their adult superiors. Do not let students speak too flippantly or casually to parents, teachers, or other adults; do teach them—by example—how to show godly respect. When they see teachers

very consciously respectful of each other in the hallways, and when they hear parents speaking respectfully of teachers around the dinner table, our children and young people will have good guidance for glorifying God by their own conduct. Go to the cross with them. Pray with them daily, “Help us to respect the teachers.” Remind them of the principles of the Reformed faith that give us the motivation to show true, God-centered respect.

Feature

The Trinity as a Model for Teaching in the Christian School

Scott Van Uffelen

Solomon, in all his wisdom, struggled with how to know and serve God. Reigning over a vast empire during a time of relative peace, Solomon undertook a study of all things that were done under heaven (Ecc. 1:13). His conclusion was that “All is vanity and vexation of spirit” apart from Jesus Christ (vs. 23). Solomon records the two antithetical worldviews in chapter 2 for our instruction and correction as Christian teachers.

For this past teacher’s convention, Kyle Bruinooge and I presented a sectional with the above title using the wisdom of Ecclesiastes as our introduction. As Solomon was tempted to first look for knowledge, understanding, joy, and pleasure in a life under the sun, we too, as Christian school teachers are tempted to teach, and to learn ourselves, by looking to the “great works” of man and by seeking the wisdom of this world. Our educational life is filled with knowledge gleaned by professionals and brilliant men and women within our field of study.

We have vast troves of information at our fingertips and sitting on our bookshelves. Our classrooms can become artifact rooms of the physical knowledge that even the worldly scientists, historians, mathematicians, etc. cling to. If that becomes the fullest extent of what we teach our students, then at the end of the day, week, month, or year we and our students will come to the disappointing conclusion that all of that work, studying, and knowledge makes life hateful. We would be prone to agree with the pessimistic mindset of many today who claim that it does not matter if we memorize that particular formula, or remember why the Civil War was fought. Either way, they argue, most will graduate, get married, have jobs, and ultimately die, the foolish the same as the wise. Fortunately for us, Scripture does not remain silent on our attitude toward instruction, or on how we are to teach and instruct God's children.

There are many references in scripture that a Christian school teacher can, and should, turn to when preparing to teach. Our sectional focused on one model, not pretending that it was The Only Model for instruction. Solomon found true joy and happiness when he turned to the Father who is above the sun, and viewed this world as a gift from God to His people. "For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight wisdom, and knowledge and joy" (Ecc. 2:26). In preparing for this sectional, we both were drawn to the concept of the love of the Father to His Son, and ultimately to His church that He gave to His Son. Understanding this properly, we saw the Trinity as being a relationship rooted in and expressing itself in love. What better model could we ask for as covenant teachers!

The Gospel of John highlights the love relationship between the Father and the Son. The Father is eternally engaged in glorifying His Son so that His Son will be the fullest expression of who He is as a Father. Countless times in the gospel accounts of the New Testament, the Father speaks of how well pleased He is with His Son, the Son being the perfect reflection of Himself. We understand this concept imperfectly when we look at the striking resemblance between fathers and sons on this earth. Within the triune God this is perfectly known as the Holy Spirit is the bond of love, the breath of love, which unites the Father and the Son in this everlasting relationship. The Trinity is a love relationship! God speaks thus of His Son in Matthew 17:5, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." In the Gospel of John, chapter 1, we are told that the Son proceeds from the *bosom* of the father. The insights that scripture gives to us concerning the relationship of the triune God are for our understanding and serve as a perfect model us to emulate. We are compelled to acknowledge that the love of the Fa-

ther for His Son is the fountain from which all of our theology, and therefore our praise, flows.

This wisdom and knowledge and joy that Solomon found, and that we are called to instruct, comes when we look at the triune God who presides over heaven and earth. Do we teach that all life is an expression of God's love? Do we view this creation as an expression of the Father's love for His Son? Do we see the love of the Son for His Father in His suffering and death for this fallen world? Proverbs 8:31 reminds us that God delights in the children of men when they love His Son. Do we teach the love of the Father's Son? Do we view our fellow teachers, our students, and ourselves as all equally called and commanded to love and to serve the Son? These were all questions we posed as precursory questions all teachers must ask when they design and prepare lessons.

There is value in using the idea of the Trinity as a model for teaching even outside the concept of a love relationship. The subtlety of Satan is especially keen in trying to influence those who actively nurture the developing minds of God's children. Even in the Christian universities, unbiblical and dangerous models of instruction are being impressed upon our prospective teachers. This is where young teachers can be tempted to be influenced by the great and mighty works of man and his experiences in this life. In this article we will focus on only two of the examples that we gave in the sectional. The first is the subtle distinction being made in the unity we have as Christians with regard to our diversity. Both of these are key words thrown about in education, with a myriad of professionals weighing in on the conversation. As astute learners we need to bear in mind that a university, by definition, seeks unity in diversity, hence the name *university*. There is oneness claimed in a university as a student body when one accepts that all are diverse and have diverse interests, career paths, talents, abilities, etc. The real drive behind this is the university's desire that all students have tolerance for the diversity of others to maintain the peaceful unity in the school, and extend this to our life as members of a nation.

Understanding the relationship of the Father to the Son and the uniqueness of the Trinity will help us answer this unbiblical mantra. The truth of the Trinity is clearly unity and diversity, two separate ideas united in the Godhead. God is One and God is Three, perfectly so. Those are two distinct ideas and concepts. To help us understand this, consider Philippians 4:8, "Whatsoever things are true... honest... just... pure... lovely... of good report... think on these things." Here we have a list of all incredibly diverse attributes of God that focus on completely dif-

ferent things, all of which are perfectly revealed in His creation, yet also unified in God Himself. We may not have diversity of opinions or views on what each of these mean for God is the standard for each. In that, we as His children must be united. Unfortunately we see the consequences in our nation of when man turns away from God and defines justice and purity without the guide of Holy Scripture. Our courts become a mess of social injustices and the internet becomes loaded with sultry pictures, comments, and posts all protected as pure manifestations of diverse individuals. It would be wise to review Dan Van Uffelen's sectional a few years ago about beauty being in the eye of the Beholder—God Himself, not man. Dan carefully articulated how in art and in literature there is diversity in what is beautiful, but unity on the definition of beauty is in God Himself and the standard He has chosen to define beauty. As a true believer we may not support, view, or read anything that is not beautiful in God's eyes.

This abstract concept of the Trinity, with its relationships, can also be used when structuring what information we use and how we conclude our units. Using math, for example, we can teach the students what a line is and what points on a line represent. We add to this instruction the next day by bringing in the concept of a second line, perpendicular to the first. We have the same level of complexity (one line with various points), but by adding it to the first we have opened up a whole new level of complexity and relationships that exist between these two. Now we can discuss objects within a two-dimensional framework, chart and graph information, etc. Adding a third line, or z-axis, brings even more completeness and reality to our understanding of the world in which we live, all using the same level of complexity. Three lines, similar in function, yet arranged in diverse relation, which brings the reality of life to bear on our understanding of His creation. All of our teaching needs to do the same—get to the relationships behind the individual points and lines we are using in our instruction.

The second way that Satan's subtlety is being felt is in the interchange of the word "differences" for "diversity." Following up on the understanding that Satan's goal is to tolerate diversity, add to this discussion how sometimes (notice not always) the word "different" is used. An easy illustration we hear often is marriage. Diversity in marriage would be varied types of couples falling in love with varied manifestations of their love for each other. Different, or alternative, marriages are something completely different and wrong!

This interchange is made when our young teachers are being called to instruct their students in their room. Educational jargon is urging us to teach the "whole"

student by means of *differentiated instruction*. A Christian teacher should pause and consider what this means. What part of your instruction needs to be different, and why? Furthermore, in what then are we to have unity in the classroom? Truly we admit that there is diversity in our students. We should allow and encourage diversity in our assignments, diversity in our presentation of materials, diversity in what we accept as the end product of an assignment, diversity in responses on a test, etc., but we should reject the notion of different instruction, different goals, and different outcomes. Once again, God is the standard for what instruction is, what the goals of our instruction should be, and the ultimate outcome must be that we see and reflect God in all things. We are called to use the diversity of our abilities, but for the same goal.

At Covenant Christian High School we have four grades. If we allow ourselves to view the 9th graders as “different” from our 11th or 12th graders, we will have problems with hazing, meanness, and fighting. Our hallways would soon become war zones where each class needs to unite among themselves and fend for themselves in protection of their “differentness.” Rather we are called to view our students as diverse, yet unified with us as teachers and fellow students. We are all the “friends of God,” His chosen people for whom He sent His Son to suffer and die. God loves the freshman as much as He loves the senior and as much as He loves me! It is not a different kind of love, or even a different level of love; it is a perfect love for His own—a love that embraces the diversity in which He created us, a diversity that is modeled after His own triune self. We are all members of His one church, united in Jesus Christ, His Son.

Let us teach, therefore, in a relationship of love, united in Him, and the truth of His Word. Let us joy in the Son, and teach all things under the Son every day.

Children's Literature: What Happened?

Rick Mingerink

With cash in my pocket, I was eager to go. My destination was a big warehouse on the outskirts of Grand Rapids suburbia. The warehouse doors open only three weeks a year, so it was an opportunity I didn't want to miss. They say anyone brave enough to enter this massive building and plumb its depths should be sure to reap rewards. I certainly wanted to take part in the dividing of the spoil.

The warehouse is operated by Scholastic, one of the largest children and Young Adult (YA) publishers in the world. Each year they open their warehouses for a few weeks to teachers, selling their overstock books at large discounts. They say those privileged enough to gain admission shouldn't be disappointed.

However, I was.

It wasn't the prices that disappointed me, nor was it the service. It was the product. The books were everywhere, but the quality of content for the majority of them was poor. Books, books everywhere, but not a one worth reading.

The current state of children's and YA literature is changing. The latest Scholastic books are a case in point. Current trends in children's and YA literature are disappointing, but there is a proper response.

Current State Of Affairs

The evidence showing a change in children's and YA literature is abundant. In December 2012, editors of Scholastic met and discussed their opinions on what kinds of books would sell in 2013. They compiled a list of ten trends that they forecast for 2013. What follows is a sampling from their list (not listed in priority):

#1: Bullying. The topic of bullying will be addressed in many kids' books.

#4: Cartoon-oriented books. These are books that are written in comic book format.

#7: Tough Girls. Powerful lead female characters will be infused in many books.

#9: Diversity. Books will feature characters that reflect a minority and/or alternative lifestyle.

#10: Ecological Focus. There will be environmentalist themes woven throughout many of the books.

The editors of Scholastic have a job to do and that is to sell books—lots of them. They are staking huge sums of money in the anticipation that books mirroring these trends will be profitable. I don't doubt they will be.

The list highlights many themes that are rooted in godlessness. In case you are wondering why bullying is in this category, it is because the current anti-bullying movement is the daughter of the tolerance and homosexual movement. Let's not be deceived into thinking the world is becoming more righteous in its pursuit to eliminate bullying. The trends in youth literature are alarming.

There are more disappointing aspects to current literature. Meghan Cox Gurdon points this out in her timely article, "The Case for Good Taste in Children's Books." The text for this article came from a speech she delivered at Hillsdale College on March 12, 2013. She is the children's book reviewer for *The Wall Street Journal*. She highlights a number of problems with modern children's and YA literature.

"Books show us the world," she writes, "and in that sense, too many books for adolescents act like funhouse mirrors, reflecting hideously distorted portrayals of life." They do this by injecting into their books topics and themes such as sexuality, homosexuality, filth of mind, mouth, and body, marital strife and infidelity, bodily self-harm whether it be eating disorders or cutting, and the list could go on.

On top of this, Gurdon explains how authors use a certain writing style, first person present tense, which engages the reader like no other style can. Gurdon continues, "Writers use this device to create a feeling of urgency, to show solidarity with reader and to make the reader feel that he or she is occupying the *persona* of the narrator." As any reader knows, this style can certainly produce a thrilling read, but when the content is filled with godlessness, the reader is emotionally and spiritually affected.

Historical Context

Some of these trends and issues are not entirely new or original. According to

Barbara Elleman (1986) in a *Library Trends* journal article, the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s brought a new direction to literature. The feminist movement was certainly an impacting force.

When feminist concerns came to the forefront, the single character became predominantly female and portrayals were distinctly individualized—girls were clearly in command... Adult women in stories also changed; no longer humdrum homebodies, they began to appear as either strong, eccentric, elderly mentors or as working mothers with jobs traditionally in the male domain—either way they figured more prominently in the plot.

Meghan Gourdan makes similar remarks. She writes, “You would not believe the extent to which children’s picture books today go out of the way to show father in an apron and mother tinkering with machinery.”

During this time period, YA literature also began to focus on issues that were distinctly adolescent in nature. In other words, in an attempt to gain readership of their books (and thus increased revenue, too), the authors and publishers pumped out books that dealt with topics a pre-teen and teen would face at that stage in life.

Enter Judy Blume. Blume emerged on the scene in the 1970s, and even as late as 2009 has been writing YA literature. Her books are widely read. In stark contrast from her predecessors in the 1940s and 1950s, Blume infused her books with topics such as menstruation, bras, teenage sex, racism, and divorce. Other topics found in her books will remain nameless.

A focus on diversity was also emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. The infusion of diversity in youth literature was primarily racial diversity. The Civil Rights movement played a large role in making this happen. Although an increasing amount of books with black characters or black authors is certainly not negative, the movement for racial diversity opened the doors for diversity of all kinds. As we look at books in 2013, the definition of diversity has changed and broadened into an embrace of a multitude of ungodly lifestyles.

Current trends in children’s and YA literature have roots in the past. They are not without their own philosophical histories. To understand this, one can understand why the current lineup of books is in the condition it is in.

Books are cultural products; their very construction, composition, and content is a reflection of the culture in which they are produced. In large part, this helps us understand why books are changing. Culture is changing and so, too, will

her products. But that isn't necessarily the whole answer. It's not just a change in mainstream American culture. If that were the only answer, you wouldn't see the influx of books that are embracing the fringes and the extremes of society. But we *are* seeing that. Many authors and publishers are putting out works that embrace the very dark edges of common culture. They are pushing the envelope. Why?

Critical Literacy

The answer, I believe, lies in a neo-Marxist ideology that has taken much of European and American society by subterfuge. The ideology is known as *critical theory* and it permeates all areas of life. It is embraced dearly by colleges and the media. Critical theory is a quieter and softer Marxism that was developed by many dissident socialists in Europe in the early twentieth century. These socialists were upset at the image socialism received by men like Stalin and Hitler. They believed these men perverted the idea of socialism and tainted the public's image of this ideology by their atrocious actions. In response, they formed the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School wanted to develop a life system that was based on the true teachings of Marx that wasn't packaged in an evil dictator.

On a basic level, critical theory attempts to critique the norms of society, uncover and question our basic assumptions of life, and in the process change the status quo into a new order. Obviously, having a Marxist mother, the critical theory child is seeking a new order that is socialist in every form and flavor.

So what does critical theory have to do with children's literature? A lot.

The praxis of critical theory is to alleviate oppression and domination of all kinds. The critical theorist envisions a world where there is no suffering. Suffering to a Marxist is measured in terms of power. Having no power is suffering. Critical theory, therefore, focuses on balancing power equally and alleviating any dominance by one group.

Traditional Judeo/Christian culture has been in dominance in Europe since the Middle Ages and in America since its founding. By nature of this position, the critical theorists argue that it is oppressive. If Christian morals are dominant, then something else must be *dominated*, they say. Anything that opposes or attempts to alter this dominance and thus rebalance power is embraced by the critical theorist.

As a side note, Calvin College's teacher education program is infused with critical theorists. (Just ask one of them; they openly embrace it.) One day in a graduate level class, I had to implement a child's book into a project I was work-

ing on. I used my favorite child's book, *A Child's Calendar*, by John Updike. As I read the book to the class, I was reproved by the professor for reading a book that pivoted on the traditional American family. Because the book assumed that this particular American way of life was "normal," I was criticized for using it in my project. Certainly, the professor argued, the book would be oppressive to students of other cultures and ways of life.

Critical theory applied to literature is reworked into a concept called critical literacy. Critical literacy understands that literature can alter the world of reality in the mind of the reader. This is true whether the reader is 6 or 66. For this reason, critical theorists have entered the realm of literature at full steam.

A book is a tool by which new societal orders can be depicted in mild, quiet, and unassuming ways. Readers begin to change their perception of reality based on what they read in literature. As time moves on, our collective perception of reality will become reality. Although it is not literature, the NBC sitcom *Will and Grace* is a case in point. One of the main characters is a homosexual. As such, homosexuality is "normalized" to the viewer. Through all of this, the alternative no longer becomes alternative. The minority no longer becomes the minority. The wrong no longer becomes the wrong. Truth no longer becomes truth. This is the goal of critical theory and critical literacy is making it happen. With institutions for higher education and the media firmly entrenched in her stronghold, it is succeeding. (And no, this is not a reason to refrain from higher education!)

Critical theorists level criticism against books that seemingly affirm the dominant status quo. If in reality, the white Judeo/Christian man holds the most power in America, a "proper" book will portray a story with a minority in power. If heterosexual marriage is in power, a "proper" book should portray a story with a homosexual marriage in power. If you are perceptive enough, you will see such storylines being promoted with a vengeance.

Response

Children's and YA literature is embracing the fringe and that is why I find much of modern literature to be disappointing at best and repulsive at worst. There is the power of a philosophical movement behind it and an ignorant public drinking it up. So what is a proper response?

One response has been offered by Meghan Gurdon. She does not want to ban any books or punish any authors. She does, however, want authors and publishers to exercise better taste. She wishes "adult authors would not simply validate

every spasm of the teen experience; and that our culture was not marching toward ever-greater explicitness in depictions of sex and violence.” She ends her article with a plea that society follows the teachings of Paul in Philippians 4:8: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure...think on these things.” Gurdon’s response is a plea for better taste.

Another response is the use of godly discernment. Parents, along with teachers, must cultivate discernment in their children. Discernment is the act of choosing something good and proper over and against something that is sinful. Children must have the tools to do this. They must know what is good. They must be aware that there is bad.

Discernment isn’t the act of creating a bubble around a child. If children only see things that are good, they won’t be discerning. Discernment implies the presence of something unwanted. So take your children to the library. Take them to a bookstore. Let them see the multitude of books that are available to check out. Guide them into making good choices. Correct them when they make poor ones.

A third response is to turn to older books. I’m referring to books that were written by generations still woven in the fabric of a Judeo/Christian morality. Read the classics. Read children’s books written a few decades ago. These books have stood the test of time for good reason. Returning to older books still requires discernment, but it opens a range of books to a young reader that will be profoundly profitable to their intellectual and spiritual well-being. It was the absence of these books that contributed to my disappointing experience at the Scholastic warehouse.

A fourth response is to become an author. Become an illustrator. It is easy to sit back and criticize and reject without putting a foot forward to furnish something positive. I realize this is a profoundly involved step, but there are many Christians who have incredible writing and artistic abilities. I know some of them. Let them use these gifts in a way that will benefit others. We all know the children’s books that have positively impacted us, why not put something on the table that will do the same for other children for generations to come?

As this world continues her descent into debauchery, our children are looking on. They are starting their immature lives in this world of today. As they grow, they mature against the backdrop of our society. Literature shapes this maturity and it is not immune to the filth. As such, it demands a response. It demands an awakening of our spiritual senses.

Let us not flee from literature, but let us engage our redeemed heart, soul, and mind to cultivate children that embrace literature, read literature, and write literature, but let them do all these things out of a motive to please and glorify their King. In the twenty-first century, that will take hard work and sober discernment; it will take adults who are purposeful in their rearing; it will take energy and conviction.

Although I may be disappointed with the current crop of children's and YA literature, that disappointment does not preclude any hope or joy in some of the pieces of work out there. There are masterpieces in our libraries or on our shelves and I'm convinced some have yet to be written. Will you find them? Will you be the one to write them?

Contribution

Principal's Corner: Teacher Evaluations

Jim Regnerus

The State of Iowa Department of Education heavily promotes teacher evaluations. The state has spent untold amounts of money and resources training school principals on how to evaluate teachers. Nobody receives their principal or administrator certification without having completed the necessary training on how to evaluate teachers. The goal, of course, is that the evaluation process will help teachers improve, and then the students will score higher and then, all in all, things will be better in Iowa's schools.

Except their method isn't working.

At least that's what Jason Glass says. He is the Director of the Iowa Department of Education. In a February 1, 2013 article in the *Sioux City Journal* entitled

“Glass: Iowa’s teacher evaluations aren’t working” he bemoans the fact that “98% of evaluated teachers receive high marks for their work.” Glass’s logic for bemoaning nearly all the teachers being evaluated very highly is that only a “very small amount of our educators are given any amount of critical feedback.” Apparently his opinion is that if principals think most the Iowa teachers are already at the top of their game, the chances of Iowa schools improving are nearly nil.

I’m not sure I have a better idea for him. Director Glass is in a tight spot. To account for Iowa’s gradual slide into mediocrity by looking at our growing number of defunct households could be political suicide. The governor’s whole education reform package, currently before the legislature, puts even more of the onus on the teachers. Director Glass has to blame the schools.

I am only increasingly thankful for our own situation. Good covenant homes make for good covenant schools.

However, while I am thankful for our school being an extension of homes that are firmly based on God’s Word, how would our evaluation of our teachers differ from those seen statewide? Are all Protestant Reformed teachers worthy of a top 2% ranking?

I think we have great teachers, but if one would ask the teachers themselves I doubt they would say they are that good. Most view themselves as falling far short of the goal of always doing their very best and seeking the glory of God in every aspect of their work. The average PR teacher would confess that apart from the grace of God he is pathetic in all that he attempts in the school. If Titus 2:9, 10 is the benchmark, then even the best of PR teachers has room for improvement. Rev. Van Overloop’s excellent January 15, 2013 *Standard Bearer* meditation entitled “Godliness for Employees” speaks to our teachers as well, and every good teacher knows it. Our teachers should read it often if we want to see real and constant improvement, as well as encouragement in our work.

Maybe Director Glass needs a copy of the SB article.

Children and Youth Literature

Sarah Mowery

Help Me! Author/illustrator: Paul Geraghty. Andersen Press Ltd, 2011. For primary readers.

A thirsty tortoise, a turtle hatchling, and an exhausted impala find help in unexpected places in this beautifully illustrated picture book. Geraghty claims to have based the extraordinary events of this story on “real, documented animal behavior.” Granted, in real life the elephant herd would usually trample the tortoise. The crocodile would eat the turtle hatchling, and the wild dogs would pounce on the impala. But your children—and you—will be surprised by the sweet endings that this book offers instead.

Opposites. Author/illustrator/publisher: Patrick George, 2010. For primary readers.

This is the first and only book I’ve read from this British husband-and-wife team, but after reading it—and re-reading and re-re-reading it—I hope to run across some of their others. *Opposites* combines bright, bold illustrations and witty optical illusions to demonstrate big vs. small, hot vs. cold, in vs. out, etc. Our three-year-old is fascinated with the book’s transparent pages. Sadly, I’ve yet to find a place in the U.S. where George’s books are available for purchase. We ran across this copy of *Opposites* at our library. See www.patrickgeorge.biz for more information.

Burt Dow, Deep-Water Man. Author/illustrator: Robert McCloskey. Puffin Books, 1963. For primary/intermediate readers.

No doubt you've read and relished McCloskey's classics, *Blueberries for Sal* and *Make Way for Ducklings*. Those, along with *One Morning in Maine*, are my favorite of his books, but our boys disagree: they're crazy about Burt Dow. Burt and his pet seagull take to the waves in his leaky old double-ender, *Tidely-Idley*. Burt snags a whale's tail with his fishing hook, and from that point forward the story becomes a whale of a tale, indeed. When Burt patches the whale's tail with a band-aid, spends a night in the whale's tummy, and emerges to face an entire school of whales, each demanding a band-aid of its own. Since most children go through the phase of believing band-aids cure everything, this "tale of the sea in the classic tradition" is sure to make them smile.

Hana's Suitcase. Author: Karen Levine. Scholastic, 2002. For intermediate/advanced readers. 111 pgs.

Our third-grade daughter recently purchased *Hana's Suitcase* from her Scholastic book order for a dollar or two. In case any of your children also purchase it from their book order, here's a review!

Hana's Suitcase is the true account of a Jewish girl's life in WWII. It is one of the sadder stories I think I've read from that era, simply because the author states very pointedly that Hana Brady and her family are not religious. One by one, Hana and her family members are imprisoned by the Nazis. Hana is gassed at Auschwitz at the age of 13. My teary daughter and I reflected what a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian, and to know that no matter what evils we may face in our lifetime, we can be comforted with the knowledge that we belong to our sovereign Father and with the hope of eternal life.

The real value of this book is in the second story it tells. Hana Brady's suitcase arrives at a children's Holocaust museum in Tokyo in 2000. Motivated by the questions of curious children, the museum's curator decides to find out about Hana Brady. Her sleuthing uncovers drawings that Hana made while in Theresienstadt concentration camp, brings her to Czech Republic, and, finally, leads her to Hana's 73-year-old brother, George, who survived the Holocaust. In our day of "just Google it," I found the discovery of Hana's life story inspirational. What stories could our children discover in their own histories or communities?

Bomb: The Race to Build—and Steal—the World’s Most Dangerous Weapon, by Steve Sheinkin. Roaring Brook Press, 2012. For advanced readers. 236 pgs.

From *Bomb*’s dust jacket: “A former textbook writer, Steve Sheinkin has dedicated his life to making up for his previous crimes by crafting gripping narratives of American history.” Sheinkin does that in *Bomb*, so successfully, in fact, that the book received a 2012 Newberry Honor award. I read the book aloud to our children and was just as intrigued as they were with the history surrounding the atomic bomb.

There are a lot of characters in the book, and Sheinkin jumps from nation to nation, from spy to spy. This can be a bit confusing—especially since many of the names are foreign—but is easily remedied by jumping back in the book to reference. Sheinkin inserts some crass language—all of it, I think, in direct quotations. In addition to all the spying and lying, there are also instances of drunkenness and other immoral behavior. Because I read the book aloud, I was able to skip over the bad language, frown on the drunkenness, note that the real problem with Robert Oppenheimer spending the night at a former girlfriend’s home was the fact that they were not married (not the fact that she was a Communist), and omit the brief reference to pilot Paul Tibbets’ backseat rendezvous with his girlfriend. These instances gave occasion to point out that, although we can be thankful that the U.S. won WWII, even in the 1940s our nation was primarily run by godless men. Overall, though, *Bomb* is a fantastic book. Our older children should be able to read it with a note of caution.

Three Times Lucky. Author: Sheila Turnage. Dial/Penguin Young Readers Group, 2012. 312 pgs. For advanced readers.

If you’d avoid this book merely on account of the word “lucky” in its title, you’re not alone. I hesitated to check it out, too. Upon reading it, though, I found the references to luck fairly infrequent—infrequent enough, I think, that they certainly do not render the book unreadable. By the time they’re old enough to read *Three Times Lucky*, our children should be well aware that we believe “all things come, not by chance, but by His Fatherly hand.”

That being said, I’m not quite sure where to put this book: I’m not ecstatic about it, but neither did I dislike it. I appreciate Turnage’s rendering of the like-

able main character, Mo, who is reminiscent of Scout Finch (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) or Opal (*Because of Winn-Dixie*). She's southern, spunky, and missing her mother. Her hometown, Tupelo Landing, NC, is turned upside-down when one of its 148 citizens is murdered. Turnage doesn't undermine death—even the death of detested Mr. Jesse gives each character a pause—and her storytelling is witty and humorous.

At the same time, I found the book an odd mix of believable and unbelievable. There are a few instances of harsh language, and like many contemporary children's books, it elevates non-conventional families. In the end, Mo is better off with the Colonel and Miss Lana (whom you finally discover are married when you arrive at the end of the story) than her best friend Dale is with his parents: halfway through the book Dale's mom files for a restraining order against her husband, Macon, a drunkard. (There is one brief but alarming scene in which a drunken Macon abuses his wife and threatens Dale and Mo.) Not even Mo's well-to-do nemesis, Anna Celeste, has a good home life. Turnage clips the mystery along to a satisfying conclusion, but is it a mystery worth reading? I'm going to leave that for you to decide.

Faithfulness Under Fire: The Story of Guido de Bres; The quest for Comfort: The Story of the Heidelberg Catechism; The Glory of Grace: The Story of the Canons of Dort. Author: William Boekestein. Illustrator: Evan Hughes. Reformation Heritage books, 2010, 2011, 2012. For intermediate readers.

This edition's "Sunday" books of note are once again published by Reformation Heritage Books, and they are three favorites of mine. In each colorfully illustrated book Boekestein briefly but thoroughly summarizes the history behind one of the three forms of unity.

Faithfulness Under Fire introduces children to Guido de Bres, the author of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Boekestein notes the violent struggle between the Roman Catholic Church and the young Protestant church at that time in history, details the important role that de Bres played as a pastor in Belgium and ends with his martyrdom. In an epilogue on the last page Boekestein notes, "We don't believe it is necessary to shield even young children from the ugliness of life as long as we also provide a context in which this life can be lived victoriously." This book does just that.

We are perhaps most familiar with the history behind the beloved Heidelberg Catechism. But *The Quest for Comfort* included details of the lives of Frederick III, Zacharius Ursinus, and Caspar Olevianus of which I was unaware. In my opinion it is the easiest book of these three to read because each of the characters' lives is so fascinating. It is an absorbing, introductory tribute to "no ordinary document."

In *The Glory of Grace* Boekestein treats the history and growth of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. He introduces children to three heretics: Pelagius, Erasmus, and Arminius, whose life is treated in more detail than the lives of the other two men, since it is in response to his erroneous teachings on predestination that the Synod of Dort convenes and the Canons of Dort are published. The book includes a summary of each of the five heads of the Canons. It is an excellent introduction to "one of the highlights in the struggle of God's people to maintain the glory of grace."

Perspectives in Covenant Education

1401 Ferndale Avenue SW

Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Address Service Requested

Non-Profit Org
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Jenison, MI
PERMIT 71