

The Bible and Its Influence

Many state and local educational organizations are at some stage of evaluating, designing, or implementing new curriculum standards. To implement these standards, courses and appropriate curriculum objectives will be needed to provide the instructional basis for students to achieve the standards. This affords the state and local districts an opportunity to introduce innovative, relevant, and research-based courses into the curriculum.

Suggested Course: “The Bible and Its Influence” is an academic elective course designed to meet English Language Arts Standards for grades 11-12.

Rationale for Course: : An **ACADEMIC** study of the **CONTENT** of the Bible provides an advantage for students as they study art, literature, music, government, history, and other subjects.

Supporting Data:

- **Impact of the Bible:** Guinness World Records [<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com>] suggests that recent estimates place the number of Bibles sold to be more than 5 billion. In a survey of 39 English professors, the results could be summed up in the statement, “Regardless of a person’s faith, an educated person needs to know about the Bible.” Several state legislatures have considered the content so valuable to students that they have passed legislation to either require or encourage the teaching of the content of the Bible. (Examples: Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas)
- **Instructional Significance: One of the most important reasons for combining the content of the Bible with English Language Arts objectives is students develop a biblical knowledge base that will better prepare them to recognize its influence in other formats such as art, literature, music, and social studies.**
 - **Imagery and Allusions:** 1300 documented biblical references in Shakespeare’s works, Martin Luther King’s, “I have seen the promised land...” speech, *Moby Dick*, and many other literary works (prose and poetry), music, and art. Some students miss the full meaning of a passage due to a lack of biblical knowledge.
 - **Influence:** historical events, government legislation, and social customs.
 - **Book of Books:** The Bible has a variety of literature in a single bound book-poetry, songs, imagery (parables), characters, plots, history, speeches, writings etc.
- **Legality:** A common question from public schools is “Can we legally offer such a course?” The answer is **YES!** A brief support for this affirmative answer consists of three points.
 - **Constitution:** First Amendment
 - **Supreme Court Ruling:** [School District of Abington Twp vs Schempp, 374 U.S. 203,225 (1963) and Stone vs. Graham, 449 U.S. 39, 42 (1980)]
 - **State Legislation:** Several states have passed legislation to allow the content to be taught in the schools.

The general legal test is that the course be taught **academically** and **objectively**. It is assumed that the instructor will provide class rules and assignments, based on the **content** of the Bible, and free of “religious” interpretation. It should be noted that more than 650 public schools in 43 states have been teaching such courses in both English and social studies courses using **The Bible and Its Influence** textbook.

General Comments Concerning the Teacher’s Edition of the Textbook (*The Bible and Its Influence*): It is very important that a course has access to quality resources to be successful. The textbook is divided into twelve units, each containing 2-4 chapters. Although the book uses the Bible as a major source of information, the emphasis is on its relation to Literature/Language, Social Studies, and the Arts. Each chapter has specific learning objectives, vocabulary words, people and places, resources, and cross-curricular connections. Activities promote reading, discussion, and collaboration. Students use critical thinking skills for such activities as analyzing information, interpreting texts, evaluating passages, and conducting literary analysis. (Example: elements such as parallelism or simile and metaphor). There are many activities in the textbook that illustrate the connection of the Bible to other curricular areas:

- Use a Semantic Feature Analysis to identify major categories of themes in some of the Psalms.
- Identify some of the 1300 documented biblical references in Shakespeare’s works.
- Read Captain Ahab’s monologue (*Moby Dick*) and determine in what ways the white whale resemble Job’s idea of God.
- Encourage students to use visual literacy skills to connect various scriptures to great works of art.
- Discuss: “Does the presence of both points (cynicism and optimism) in Ecclesiastes weaken its message or does the paradox strengthen the effect of the book.”
- Ask students to evaluate the helpfulness of the advice contained in the Proverbs for people today. (friendship, love, managing money achieving success, getting along with others). Divide into groups and find advice from the book.
- Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast three books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs).
- Identify the main themes, audiences, and key events and people in the Gospel of Matthew.
- Explain how the Sermon on the Mount draws a parallel between Jesus and Moses.
- In Matthew 5:13-14, the metaphors of salt and light are used. Why are salt and light effective to use?
- Identify the main themes and initial audience of Paul’s letters Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians and describe their influence on Western culture.
- What are the characteristics of biblical letters?

These items from the text are given to illustrate the scope of the book and see the strength of the English Language Arts objectives. It provides a new instructional tool to teach both reading and writing skills. In addition, it provides for many opportunities to apply knowledge found in one setting to a different setting. The book is designed to provide both teacher and student with appropriate information and instructional guidance to improve English Language Arts skills and develop knowledge of the content of the Bible.

Each chapter promotes working with the text (instruct, collaborate, read, and discuss). There are specific activities related to critical thinking, visual literacy, writing activities, and cross-curricular and cultural connections.

In addition to the textbook, there is a CD with a pacing guide, people and places of influence, assessments, graphic organizers, project activities, project rubrics, and writing activities.

For more information concerning the textbook, *The Bible and Its Influence*, go to www.bibleliteracy.org.

***The Bible and Its Influence* Meets National, State, and Local Standards**

This is a limited list to illustrate how the combination of Bible content and textbook activities relate to standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) (<http://www.ncte.org/standards/ncte-ira>)

Textbook Example	Standard
Shakespeare used over 1300 documented biblical references in his 37 plays. Some references are obvious; some he used the image and developed it to fit his needs. Ask students to identify some biblical images in readings from Shakespeare. P.156	1,2
Have students read Captain Ahab’s monologue (Moby Dick) and determine in what ways Ahab’s idea of the white whale resemble Job’s idea of God? P. 154	1,3,4,6
During the study of Proverbs, students are introduced to paintings of Pollaiuolo (Prudence), Veronese (Justice), Botticelli(Fortitude), and Sir Edward Burne-Jones (Temperantia) that depict the <i>cardinal virtues</i> . Discuss the symbolism of each and how they relate to passages in Proverbs. P. 138	3,4,6
Identify the themes, characters, plot, and familiar passages of the Book of Job. Trace the influence of the Book of Job on Western philosophy and literature. P. 148	2,3,5
Chapter 13. Use a Semantic Feature Analysis to identify categories of themes in some of the Psalms.	2,3
Chapter 14. Use a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast three of the books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs).	3
Chapter 15. Use a Position Statement Chart to write summary statements for each character.	7
Study the literary techniques of Hebrew poetry. P. 128	2,3,9
Have students page through the book of Job to note how it is organized as a drama, complete with stage notes identifying the “characters” when it is their turn to speak. P.148	1,2,3,11
The structure of the 23 rd Psalm uses personification as a literary device to express meaning in a three-stanza psalm. (1 st Stanza-The Shepard, 2 nd Stanza-The Peril, 3 rd Stanza-Benefits and Blessings) p. 133	1,2,3
Compare Joshua’s farewell message in Joshua 24 to the one given by Moses in Deuteronomy 30. How are they similar? P. 79	1,2
In Matthew 5:13-14 the metaphors of salt and light are used. Why were salt and light an effective choice to use? P. 225	1,2
The prayer in John 17 provides an intimate view into Jesus’ final hours. What are the prayer’s mood, tone, and content? P. 241	1, 2,5
The Unit Writing Activity (12 units) requires students to use chapter content and ideas to write for various audiences and various purposes. Unit Writing Rubrics set forth criteria for each activity. P. T13	4,5,6,7
The Unit Project Activities offer students self-selected, project-based opportunities to apply knowledge, differentiate instruction, and integrate curriculum into areas of visual arts, technology, dramatization, music, speech, and writing. Projects may be completed as independent, partner, or small group work. Unit Project Rubrics help communicate the criteria for each project. P. T13	7,8,11,12