



Teaching Three Great Books with Dr. Flora Armetta

Lesson 1: An Overview

Outline:

Goals of Course

- Introduction of novels from a specialist
- Suggest ways to apply literature
- Inspire teachers with ideas

Suggestions

- Begin by asking students to read aloud (or do so yourself), and ask why the author chose the words they did and what effect these have on readers.
 - This brings us in conversation with the author, and we think about historical circumstances.
 - Pleasurable way to practice dialectic and rhetoric habits, and public speaking
 - A break from teacher's voice; varies teaching techniques

Why shall we teach literature?

- Train students to be attentive and immersed while reading.
- To seek out and recognize historical events and ideas.
- To become empathetic with and critical of what it means to be a human.
- Teachers should continually seek out author's worldview.
 - This helps students respond thoughtfully and articulately to what they read.
 - It shapes students' understanding of themselves and God's plan for them.

Preliminaries

- Should have read these novels previously.
- The entire novel will be addressed according to the recurring themes discussed in this course (Note; this will not likely be how you teach the novels).
- Begin teaching with your goal for the novel in mind; use open-ended questions to help students make discoveries.

Recurring themes (patterns) from Classical literature: These reflect human assumptions about how human beings function in this world; we inherit these assumptions and hold many today.

- **Idea of the Seeker**



- Journey of moral and psychological growth - bildungsroman (novel of education or formation)
 - Secular idea of what maturity means
 - Growing up means becoming disenchanted with childish hopes and “settling in” to the seriousness of life (secular satisfying ending).
 - As Christians, we look for the hope that is promised despite the fallen state of the world; “the best is yet to come” (“growing toward righteousness”).
 - Last lines suggest the stories do not, in fact, actually end, and that man’s flawed state is irreparable by man himself.
 - As teachers, be aware of what endings imply and articulate how they resonate with respect to a Christian worldview.
 - Biblical growth and change - Augustine and Dante.
 - *The Confessions* - clear before and after salvation growth never ends for the human being as he continues always seeking Christ.
 - *Dante* - God’s love movement
- The endings of our 3 loves are also about continuous movement and growth (seeking).
- **Relationship between bodies and souls** (both must be treated)
 - Novels portray inner and outer qualities of characters at odds with one another, as well as those that feed one another.
 - Flesh and spirit cannot exist independently of one another.
 - Plato’s *Symposium*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and Galatians 2:20 provide Classical and Biblical representations of these ideas.
- **Natural science** - a harmonious and respectful relationship with the natural world; each novel evokes a world of nature in need of reckoning and understanding (compare to man’s dominion and corruption of Eden).
 - Virgil, Book 11 - entire natural world is affected by a young soldier’s death; Book 8 - vision of what Rome would be; brutality used to achieve it.
 - Man’s attempts to order the natural world cannot help but result in the corruption of it.

The Good, the True, and the Beautiful

- Philippians 4:8
- Greek “arete” - virtue or excellence of any kind.
- “Cosmic piety” - e.g. Plato’s *Apology*; these ideals exist and deserve to be recognized, held in reverence, and reached for.



- In Virgil, Aeneas is victorious because he is submissive to “the greater good”; see also, Diotima’s speech in *The Symposium*.
 - The idea that Beauty is a thing, by and with itself should remind us of the Alpha and Omega (Exodus 3:14).
- Dante’s *Inferno*, Canto 4, reinforces the rightful submission to unchanging truths by placing Plato and Socrates in limbo.
 - These truths are why Huck saves Jim; why Jane leaves Rochester; why Pip relinquishes his wealth.

Cautions

- Teach appreciation and careful contemplation of these works; be careful not to require that students love them.