

# Teaching Literature with Faith

## Using literature to bring light to the darkness

### Why Read Difficult Literature?

#### Literature Reflects a Fallen World

- Books like *Brave New World* or *Hamlet* reflect brokenness—just as Scripture includes stories of murder, lust, and rebellion.
- Romans 12:2 – “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

#### Classics as Cautionary Tales

- They provide mirrors and windows into human nature, culture, and moral decay.
- Reading them with discernment helps students build wisdom.

#### Jesus Engaged with Culture Thoughtfully

- He didn’t avoid hard topics—He brought light to them.
- Encourage students to do the same.

### Literary Criticism with a Biblical Worldview

#### Key Approaches to Literary Criticism:

##### 1. Historical/Biographical Criticism

- Context matters. Understand the time and author.
- Heart of Darkness* → Colonization & racism.
  - Acts 17:26 – “From one man he made all the nations...”

##### 2. Moral/Philosophical Criticism

- Ask: What values are promoted? What is condemned?
- 1984* and *Brave New World* → Truth, control, identity.
  - John 8:32 – “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

##### 3. Reader-Response Criticism

- What do you think? How does your worldview affect your reading?
- Use this to introduce Scripture into the discussion naturally.
- Frankenstein* → What does it mean to be human?
  - Psalm 139:14 – “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made...”

##### 4. Sociological Criticism

- Explore societal norms, injustice, gender, class, race.
- Romeo & Juliet* → Family, rebellion, impulsive love.
  - Proverbs 4:23 – “Above all else, guard your heart...”

#### Encourage Comparison with Biblical Truth

- Create charts/discussion guides that show contrast between the text’s worldview and Scripture.
- Invite students to wrestle, not retreat.



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## Addressing Specific Hard Topics with Grace & Courage

### Literary Theme

Sexuality

Suicide & Depression

Racism & Slavery

Identity & Individuality

Revenge & Justice

### Example Text

*Brave New World*

*Romeo & Juliet*

*Heart of Darkness*

*1984, Frankenstein*

*Hamlet*

### Biblical Conversation Prompt

God's design: Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:18

Hope and worth: Psalm 34:18, Romans 15:13

Dignity of all: Galatians 3:28, Micah 6:8

Made in God's image: Genesis 1:27, Ephesians 2:10

Vengeance is God's: Romans 12:19

**Note: Always lead with grace, not fear. Avoid oversimplification.**

**Let students ask hard questions.**

## Practical Teaching Strategies

### Read with Margins & Mindfulness

- Annotate with questions and Scripture.
- Encourage journaling responses.

### Discussion over Censorship

- Avoid banning. *Teach discernment.*
- Encourage biblical debate and conversation.

### Equip with Biblical Literacy

- Use Scripture not as a weapon, but as a light.
- Help students connect what they read with what they believe.

**“Whatever is true, whatever is noble...think about such things.”** Philippians 4:8

*This includes analyzing even the false in order to better know and cling to the true.*



Anna Knaub, is a licensed PA teacher and has been teaching at True North since 2021, where she has taught both History and English classes. She has a passion for classic literature, and teaching it from an encouraging, purposeful, Christian worldview; tackling tough topics in literature & history, with grace and compassion. For the 2025-2026 school year she is teaching *Brit Lit Survey*, *Worlds Unraveled*, and *Cinematic Stories*.



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## Literary Criticism Cheat Sheet

## **Criticism & Questions to Ask**

- **Historical/Biographical:** What was happening in the world when this was written? What influenced the author?
- **Moral/Philosophical:** What does the book say is right or wrong? Do we agree? Why or why not?
- **Reader-Response:** How does this story make you feel or think? What would Jesus say about it?
- **Sociological:** What does the story say about society, power, family, or culture?

## Conversation Starters for Any Book

- What do you think this book says about people and the world?
- Does the author seem hopeful, cynical, angry, or something else?
- Which character do you relate to, and why?
- What lie is being told in this story? What truth do we find in Scripture?
- How does this story help us understand sin, redemption, or grace?

