

# Teaching

## *Life Writing* (as an Alternative to Fiction)

# in the Literature Classroom

**A**dventist English teachers have a long history of defending fiction. This is in response to challenges brought by students, parents, and church members who say Ellen G. White condemned the reading of fiction.<sup>1</sup> While a number of Adventist English professionals have spent many pages arguing that Ellen White's comments on fiction have been misunderstood—as well as many pages discussing the merits of fiction—I'd like to present an alternate perspective. My aim is neither to argue for nor against fiction, since many Adventist English professionals and scholars have already shared similar arguments (see Sidebar 1 on

page 5). Instead, as a conscientious Adventist who still places confidence in Ellen White's writings, I'd like to do several things: First, I'd like to revisit a few of Ellen White's comments that once troubled a younger *me*; see what wisdom I can gain from them today; and urge all Adventists, but especially Adventist English teachers, to choose literature with care—whether they choose fiction or non-fiction. Second, as a (writing) professor who teaches mainly general-education literature classes—that is, I teach literature to primarily non-English majors—I want to present a type of *non-fiction* literature that I have found to be my best tool for creating courses that can benefit the greatest number of students: Life Writing.

Life Writing is an umbrella term

encompassing autobiography, biography, memoir, diaries, letters, or any non-fiction writing about an individual's life. In this article, I refer to the more literary and audience-focused varieties of Life Writing, such as autobiographies and memoirs. Although these genres themselves are not new, the term "Life Writing" is gaining new scholarly attention because it allows teachers to include writers of all backgrounds in the ever-changing canon.<sup>2</sup> For English teachers and scholars, a Life Writing approach opens doors to texts by many previously unknown and unstudied writers, including women, people of color, and both religious and non-religious writers throughout history—an exciting pos-

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## Sidebar 1. Additional Thoughts for Consideration

In “Adventists and Fiction: Another Look,”\* Scott Moncrieff stated that readers could not take Ellen White’s negative comments on fiction at face value; rather, he urged readers to consider the context in which she wrote them, and also consider White’s own reading practices. For one, Moncrieff pointed out, Ellen White’s comments were appropriately directed at the popular fiction of her day, which John Wood showed deserved critique in his article, “The Trashy Novel Revisited: Popular Fiction in the Age of Ellen White.”† For another reason, as Moncrieff and other Adventist scholars have pointed out, Ellen White herself *read* fiction: notably, she praised *Pilgrim’s Progress* for having “heavenly” qualities. What’s more, “White clipped many stories from religious periodicals of her day, assembled them in scrapbooks, and eventually compiled selections from these scrapbooks into *Sabbath Readings*.”‡

Scholars like John Waller have concluded that many of these stories were, in fact, fictional; thus, Ellen White must not have been “indiscriminately” condemning “all stories that do not happen to be true-to-fact.”§ Moncrieff’s conclusion on the matter is this: “While it is clear that [Ellen White] makes many statements against the novel and fiction, a wholesale condemnation of the genre would be contradictory to her own practice, and not necessarily according to the reasons for which she condemns fiction.”¶ In other words, Moncrieff shows that the issue, for Ellen White, was not so much *fiction* as it was *undesirable qualities* of the fiction—qualities that could apply to many forms of media today, such as the qualities of being “addictive,” “sentimental, sensational, erotic, profane, or trashy,” “escapist,” or the fact that literature exhibiting these qualities “unfits the mind for serious study and devotional life.”¶¶ In addition, as noted above, the foremost problem for Ellen White appeared to be the “time-consuming” nature of fiction, which necessarily distracted readers from life’s practical duties. Moncrieff’s view, that we need to reconsider Ellen White’s comments and not throw out all fiction altogether, seems quite reasonable.

Moncrieff, joined by Vanessa Correderra in their article “Fiction and Film: Thoughts on Teaching Potentially Controversial Narratives,” continues the discussion, stating that “English professionals must think through the pedagogical value of teaching fictional narratives in the classroom, anticipate some of the most common objections to such use, and beyond that, consider the appropriate use of material that may be somewhat challenging, controversial, or mature, in addition to its fictional nature.”\*\*\* To their credit, they take up their own challenge: they enumerate commonplace arguments many other Christian literary scholars (such as Sallie McFague TeSelle, Gene Edward Veith, Benjamin Myer, and Mark Knight) have made in favor of teaching fiction. Namely, they say that fiction forms a significant part of the traditional literary canon and thus has “lasting cultural impact”; fiction is interesting and likely to capture the interest of students; fiction allows us to enter the perspectives of others, whom we as Christians are called to help; fiction allows us to encounter and think through difficult scenarios in a safe environment; and fiction allows us to develop critical-thinking skills, among others. In other words, they make a strong case that fiction can add value to literature courses.

### REFERENCES

\* Scott Moncrieff, “Adventists and Fiction: Another Look,” *Dialogue* 8:3 (1996): 9-12: [https://christinetheclassroom.org/vol\\_18/18cc\\_363-366.pdf](https://christinetheclassroom.org/vol_18/18cc_363-366.pdf).

† John Wood, “The Trashy Novel Revisited: Crucial Aspect in Reading? Popular Fiction in the Age of Ellen White,” *Spectrum* (April 1976): 16-21; cited in *ibid.*, 10.

‡ Moncrieff, “Adventists and Fiction: Another Look.”

§ John O. Waller, “A Contextual Study of Ellen G. White’s Counsel Concerning Fiction.” A paper read to the quadrennial meeting of Seventh-day Adventist college English teachers at La Sierra College (Riverside, California), August 1965; cited in *ibid.*, 11.

¶ Moncrieff, “Adventists and Fiction: Another Look,” 11.

¶¶ *Ibid.*

\*\*\* *The Journal of Adventist Education* 78:1 (October/November 2015): 23: <https://circle.adventistlearncommunity.com/files/jae/en/jae201578012206.pdf>.

sibility for English professionals who are looking for new ways to “do” literature (see Sidebar 2 on page 6).

For Adventist English professionals, an additional benefit of Life Writing is that it offers a gold mine of previously noncanonical literature, much of it written with literary beauty and also compatible with Ellen White’s comments on literature—comments that, at some point or another, are bound to challenge literature teachers in Adventist schools. For me, such challenges came even earlier than my teaching career, and I will include some of them in this article to make my argument.

### A Young Adventist English Major Encounters Ellen White

My troubled thoughts on literature all started around age 20, when my mom sent me, a young English major, *The Ministry of Healing* by Ellen White. When I read the chapters on literature that Mom had bookmarked, I promptly became troubled.

What were Ellen White’s comments that upset me? Briefly, she stated that literature written by “infidel authors” (or non-Christians) should have no place in true education.<sup>3</sup> Referring to Greek tragedies and other classics, she wrote that this kind of education, in requiring time to study dead languages, neglected preparation for “life’s practical duties,” such as parenthood and becoming Christlike examples in the home and public spheres.<sup>4</sup> Referring to fiction at large, especially romance novels or “frivolous, exciting tales,” Ellen White wrote that such reading “encourages the habit of hasty and superficial reading merely for the story”; “creates a distaste for life’s practical duties”; and ultimately “destroys interest in the Bible,” which, for the Christian, should be the ultimate text of study.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Ellen White targeted myths and fairy tales, saying that the ideas presented therein “impart false views of life and beget and foster a desire for the unreal,” thus “[diverting] the minds of old and young from the great

## Sidebar 2. Life Writing and Canonical Breakthroughs

For many decades, scholars have turned to Life Writing in order to include historically marginalized voices—although earlier scholars did not use this term. As James Olney notes, African American writers entered the canon “through the door of autobiography”<sup>\*</sup>; and Kenneth Roemer points out that until the 1970s and 1980s, Native American literature was not even acknowledged; now, however, with the move toward greater representation, diversity, and inclusion, scholars and teachers can include in the canon many works ascribed to Native Americans, such as the autobiography of Black Hawk, the narrative of Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, and the spiritual autobiography of William Apess, among others.† Feminist scholars make similar observations about women’s writing. For instance, Jennifer Sinor observes that women’s diaries have moved from not being considered autobiography to being considered, among many diary scholars, the “most authentic form of autobiography.”‡ Indeed, one reason life writing has become popular in the academy is that it is inclusive: It has admitted those groups that were traditionally excluded from privileges such as education, literacy, leisure time, and literary training. Currently, the field of life-writing scholarship is thriving, and the canon is expanding quickly to include women and minority writers. As scholars like James Olney, Arnold Krupat, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, and Estelle Jelinek have pointed out, Life Writing is one of the oldest genres, but it is a relatively new field in literary studies.

### REFERENCES

\* James Olney, “Autobiography and the Culture Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction.” In *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, James Olney, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 15, 3-27.

† Kenneth Roemer, “Introduction.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, eds. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15, 3-27.

‡ Jennifer Sinor, “A Story of the Diary.” In *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray’s Diary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), 48.

encounter and think through difficult scenarios in a safe environment.<sup>9</sup> Still, another argument holds that fiction allows us to develop critical-thinking skills, including comparing a Christian worldview with other worldviews.<sup>10</sup> In other words, these scholars make a strong case that certain forms of fiction belong in and add value to literature courses.<sup>11</sup>

I completely agree that fiction can add value to English classes—and to life—by inviting readers to encounter ideas, experiences, people, and situations not available in everyday life. I am poorly traveled but well-read, yet my reading has given me a fairly broad experience of the world. However, as an adult and an Adventist English professional, even though I agree with these arguments, I find myself continuing to grapple with what literature to teach in my classes.<sup>12</sup>

I realize English professionals will never completely agree on what literature to teach in our classrooms. However, for professors who profess Adventist Christianity, we must, to uphold our own integrity, give a serious ear to Ellen White’s comments, as well as the biblical injunction to fill our minds with what is lovely, pure, and true (Philippians 4:8). We also ought to check in regularly with the guidelines for choosing literature provided by the Adventist Church (see Sidebar 3 on page 7).<sup>13</sup>

### My Reading Background

I developed a love for literature through reading fiction. Some of my best memories growing up come from reading “exciting stories,” some of which I’m sure Ellen White would have condemned. My parents were new Adventists still trying to figure out the mechanics of the Adventist home. It’s hard doing life in a way you’ve never done before—just like it’s hard teaching differently than you were taught. So, I inherited a home full of the books, music, movies, sports, and media my parents grew up on.

Somewhere amid my profuse media exposure and mounting chal-

work of character building” and “[preventing] them from obtaining a knowledge of those [biblical] truths that would be their safeguard.”<sup>6</sup> A careful reading of these comments reveals that Ellen White did not claim that fiction in and of itself was wrong; rather, her foremost criticism of certain literature was that it distracted Christians from what they should be doing instead.

At my particular Adventist university, these questions were not often raised in class, so I carried them into my Master’s and doctoral degrees years later, writing a seminar paper and then a dissertation chapter on this topic, trying to figure out my stance on Adventist Christians and literature.

### Some Responses to the Fiction Question

During research for my Master’s degree, I discovered that Ellen White wasn’t the only religious writer to criticize literature and that Seventh-day Adventists are not the only denomination to struggle with this issue. As I studied the topic of “Christians and Literature,” I found plenty of scholarship from other Christians.<sup>7</sup> One common argument I found from these scholars was that fiction is useful because it allows us to understand the perspectives of others we, as Christians, are called to help.<sup>8</sup> Another argument holds that fiction allows us to

lenges in my home, I began to question the potency of our faith. Of course, I continued to love fiction. Good things happened in the fiction I read. Bad things happened in real life. So, I numbed myself through my coming-of-age years through fiction. In college, I quelled major depression and suicidal tendencies with mind-numbing 18-credit semesters and 30-hour workweeks. By the time I started my first job teaching high school English, I realized that I could no longer hide in fiction. I had to face some serious realities. I fell on my knees after an excruciating first year of teaching, and I begged God to give me a new mind because my mind was literally bent on self-destruction.

### New and Renewing Reading Habits

As I pleaded for God to change me, He answered that I also needed to change some things. Because I struggled with self-destructive thoughts, I had to change my reading habits and my media habits at large. So, I purged music, movies, and books—including some literature anthologies from my bachelor's degree. I turned to the

Bible, and, providentially, I turned to true stories. To be more specific, I sought out autobiographies and memoirs of people (some Christian and some not) who faced hard times and who overcame them or who grew up to do great things despite traumatic childhoods. Although I didn't know the correct technical terms at the time, I was discovering the power of Life Writing. In my case, reading true stories of real people who had surmounted depression, despair, and even death, as well as coming-of-age stories where the protagonist finds his or her purpose in life, became a lifeline to hope. I began to imagine that such was possible for me.

Of course, this was a process of trial and error over some years. Just because a story is "true" doesn't make it uplifting. Many non-fiction books end in despair, celebrate evil, or, for many other reasons, don't belong on the shelves of Christians. Unfortunately, in my search for answers, I also read some non-fiction books of that variety. So, I kept searching.

I started looking for true stories

written by Christians. I found some, but not as many as I would have liked.<sup>14</sup> So, I wrote and published my own.<sup>15</sup> I decided then that a major goal of Christian English teachers should be to prepare students to write their own stories and testimonies and those of others: The world needs these stories! This is where reading and writing constitute a loop: The Bible says that by beholding, we become changed (2 Corinthians 4:18). I say that by reading and writing, we also become changed. As English teachers, we should carefully consider what literature we teach, both fiction *and* non-fiction, knowing it will influence the mindsets and characters of our students. Likewise, we should carefully craft our writing assignments. Who knows, we could be influencing generations of readers to come. Fortunately for me and my experimental ways of teaching, the field of English is currently changing to accommodate many new approaches, such as including more Life Writing in literature and composition courses.

### Recent Trends in English Departments

The college English department is unique because there is no set course of study for each English major. Having recently completed my PhD in English, I know that what gets taught largely depends on field trends and instructor preferences. One current trend is that Western culture is out; diversity is in. The traditional canon, which includes mostly fiction—novels, short stories, plays—is not the giant it once was because these genres were historically dominated by white men from Europe and North America, or those privileged with education, social status, and money. Now, the primary concern of many English professors and literary scholars is diversity, representation, and inclusion, opening the canon to ordinary, non-fiction genres—those historically *available* to women and people of color. This includes not only the more literary genres of autobiography and memoir, but also the lesser studied, and usually non-literary, gen-

### Sidebar 3. A Brief Summary of the Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Schools

Literature assigned in Adventist schools should;

- Be serious art;
- Lead to significant insight into the nature of humans and society and be compatible with Adventist values;
- Avoid sensational (the exploitation of sex or violence) and maudlin sentimentality (the exploitation of softer feelings to the detriment of a sane and level view of life);
- Not be characterized by profanity or other crude, offensive language;
- Avoid elements that give the appearance of making evil desirable or goodness trivial;
- Avoid simplified, excitingly suspenseful, or plot-dominated stories that encourage hasty or superficial reading; and
- Be adapted to the maturity level of the group or individual.

Adapted from the General Conference Department of Education's *A Brief Summary of the Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh day Adventist Schools* (2011): <https://www.adventistedge.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Literature-Selection-Summary.pdf>.

res of diaries, letters, and other personal documents.<sup>16</sup> As I quickly discovered through graduate courses like Early Native American Literature, Early African American Evangelical Literature, and Early Modern Literature (in which we studied recipe books by women), Life Writing can be and has been written by anyone, no matter his or her race, class, or education level.<sup>17</sup> As I also found out, religious Life Writing can be found in virtually any literary period one is studying—or teaching.

My graduate professors, then, were teaching Life Writing texts, including spiritual autobiographies, as a way of including minority writers.<sup>18</sup> They were *not* teaching these texts to inspire faith in their students. However, as a Christian English professional searching for texts that could support my students' faith, as well as bolster my own, I *was* inspired. With this new vista of Life Writing open to me, I was able to compile long reading lists of texts that were considered both "exciting" in the field of English *and* compatible with a Christian worldview. (View a sample Life Writing syllabus here: <https://www.journalofadventisteducation.org/en/supplement.-life-writing-sample-syllabus>).

### Teaching Idea: What My Adventist University Is Doing

At Southwestern Adventist University, in Keene, Texas, U.S.A., we have decided to open this topic for investigation by our students through a new course called "Christians and Literature." In the course, which I am currently teaching for the first time, students will read what Ellen White, Adventist literary scholars, and scholars of other faiths say about the topic of literature; they are also asked to articulate ("discuss and defend") their own philosophy of reading, writing, and/or teaching literature in weekly class discussions and a 10-page capstone paper.

My goal as the teacher of this course is to give students the gift of time to work through some of the hard questions I was able to work through during my MA and PhD studies. In contrast with typical literature courses and literary analysis assignments, which have already decided for students what they should read, this new course asks students to go "meta": to think about what we should really be reading in the first place. The course is designed so that

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my students will investigate the options, including fiction *and* non-fiction; think through principles for choosing literature; and support whatever they choose with an essay, much like this one, that blends research with personal experience to explain *why* a particular form(s) of literature holds value for *them*, and potentially for *their own* future students. For my students who are Christians, I also ask them to talk about how they will use their knowledge of literature to serve God and others throughout their lives.

### Conclusion: Life Writing as an Alternative to Fiction

One of the main questions that drove my research into this topic was: What literature will be *most* beneficial to the greatest number of students? In response, I'll offer a few additional questions. What would happen if Adventist English teachers could detach themselves from their formative influences, and face this question with an open mind: *What should we read and teach?* What if we stop looking at Ellen White's counsel negatively (as prohibitions) and look at it in the positive? Using guidelines from Ellen White, the Adventist Church, and other Christians and scholars whom we respect, what excellent literature is available to us?

In some of her last recorded advice before she died in 1915, Ellen White wrote:

"We should advise the young . . . to take hold of such reading matter as recommends itself for the upbuilding of the Christian character. The most essential points of our faith should be stamped upon the memory of the young. . . . Our youth should read that which will have a healthful, sanctifying effect upon the mind. This they need in order to be able to discern what is true religion. *There is much good reading that is not sanctifying.*

"Now is our time and opportunity to labor for the young people. Tell them that we are now in a perilous crisis, and we want to know how to discern true godliness. Our young people need to be helped, uplifted, and encouraged, but in the right manner, not, perhaps, as they would desire it, but in a way that will help them to have sanctified minds. They need good, sanctifying religion more than anything else."<sup>19</sup>

Along with Ellen White, I believe Adventist schools should have a different primary focus than secular schools. While Adventist educators share the common goals of virtually all educators to help students think critically, and to expose them to

many and varied perspectives, we differ in that we place a Christian worldview at the center of our classes; we also differ in that we believe that we are not just preparing students for “service in this world” but also for “wider service in the world to come.”<sup>20</sup>

In my experience so far, I have found non-fiction—specifically, uplifting true-life stories (often, but not necessarily, by Christians)—to be the most valuable to the greatest number of my general-education students. These true stories seem most likely to help students live in the real world, and true stories by Christians seem the most uplifting to me as the professor who has to live and breathe what I teach. Scholars and teachers at many public universities have already embraced Life Writing as a new way to “do” literature; maybe this is one trend from which Adventist English professionals should take inspiration. ✍️

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*This article has been peer reviewed.*

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#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See, for instance, John O. Waller, “A Contextual Study of Ellen G. White’s Counsel Concerning Fiction,” a paper read to the quadrennial meeting of Seventh-day Adventist college English teachers at La Sierra College, Riverside, California, August 1965; John Wood, “The Trashy Novel Revisited: Popular Fiction in the Age of Ellen White,” *Spec-trum* 7 (April 1976): 16-21; Scott Moncrieff, “Adventists and Fiction: Another Look” *Dialogue* 8:3 (1996); and Scott Moncrieff and Vanessa Correda, “Fiction and Film: Thoughts on Teaching Potentially Controversial Narratives,” *The Journal of Adventist Education* 78:1 (October/November 2015): 23-27.

2. Some examples include Estelle Jelinek, “Women’s Autobiography and the Male Tradition,” in *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1980), 1-20; Arnold Krupat, “American Autobiography: The Western Tradition,” *The Georgia Review* 35:2 (1981): 307-317; James Olney, “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction,” in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 3-27; Kenneth Roemer, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*, Joy Porter and Kenneth M. Roemer, eds. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-24; Jennifer Sinor, “A Story of the Diary,” in *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing: Annie Ray’s Diary* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002); Roger Smith, “Self-Reflection and the Self,” in *Rewriting the Self: Histories From the Renaissance to the Present*, Roy Porter, ed. (London: Routledge, 1997), 43-47; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Situating Subjectivity in Women’s Autobiographical Practices,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, eds. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 3-52.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1905), 440.

4. *Ibid.*, 444, 446.

5. *Ibid.*, 445.

6. *Ibid.*, 446.

7. John A. Anonby, “A Christian Perspective on English Literature,” in *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines*, Deane E. D. Downey and Stanley A. Porter, eds. (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 233-247; Mark Knight, *An Introduction to Religion and Literature* (London: Continuum, 2009);

Arlin G. Meyer, “Teaching Literature as Mediation: A Christian Practice,” in *Teaching as an Act of Faith: Theory and Practice in Church-Related Higher Education*, Arlin C. Migliazzo, ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 253-276; Susan Resneck Parr, *The Moral of the Story: Literature, Values, and American Education* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 1982); Sallie McFague TeSelle, *Literature and the Christian Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966); Gene Edward Veith, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Crossway Books, 1990).

8. TeSelle, *Literature and the Christian Life*; Veith, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature*.

9. Anonby, “A Christian Perspective on English Literature”; Knight, *An Introduction to Religion and Literature*.

10. Knight, *An Introduction to Religion and Literature*; Myer, “Teaching Literature as Mediation: A Christian Practice”; Parr, *The Moral of the Story: Literature, Values, and American Education*.

11. Mark Knight says, “Our reading of literary texts is not bound by the views or beliefs of the authors, a point that is liberating for religious readings of literature” (*ibid.*, 4). In other words, teachers can use nonreligious texts to approach religious topics. For example, *Frankenstein* offers an interesting, if troubling, perspective on creation that could be connected with the Genesis narrative (*ibid.*, 15); Dickens’s *Bleak House* and Kafka’s *The Trial*, with their focus on legalities, could be used to examine the Law, as it relates to Christian tradition (*ibid.*, 49); and various works by Coleridge, Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Philip Roth, and Ian McEwan could all provide inroads for talking about “the stain of sin” (*ibid.*, 90). Though these works and authors may not exemplify Christian beliefs, they can still be useful for examining those beliefs. “A religious reading of a text,” Knight says, “is congruent at some level with virtually every branch of literary criticism and it does not have to restrict itself to subject matter typically seen as sacred” (*ibid.*, 3). However, Arlin Myer holds that “almost all great works of literature deal with fundamental moral issues and to that extent are religious works” (“Teaching Literature as Mediation,” 265).

Writing from the position of a secular educator looking to promote morality through her classroom, Susan Resneck Parr says that literature “often encourages students to consider difficult moral problems that they might otherwise choose to ignore” (*The Moral of the Story: Literature, Values, and American Education*, 19). Building on TeSelle and Lewis’s idea that studying literature enables readers to broaden their experiences (for the purpose of becoming better able to relate to and save fallen humanity), Myer suggests the added benefit of concentrating on many works by one author, and then having students compare the author’s worldview with their own.

Doing so, he says, allows students to examine the worldviews embodied in the writers' works, which then "prompts" students to "re-examine their own views of the major questions of life in relationship to those embodied in the literature" ("Teaching Literature as Mediation," 264). In his 20th-century fiction course, Myer juxtaposes the teaching of writers who rejected Christianity—such as James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and E. M. Forster—with other writers who either "write from a Christian perspective or deal explicitly with issues of faith," such as Flannery O'Connor, Graham Greene, John Updike, Larry Woiwode, and John Irving (*ibid.*, 265). A final way Myer gets students to examine their own worldviews is to compare and contrast them with those of an author they have studied in depth on the final exam (*ibid.*, 265). Myer says that just as each work of art has its own vision, so every "mature reader has her own worldview, her vision of reality, her set of beliefs. And if I do my task properly as a teacher, then it is precisely the . . . direct confrontation of these differing visions of the world that makes the reading of fiction such a powerful, transformative, and profound experience for my students" (*ibid.*, 266). I, of course, think this is an effective,

worthy approach in the Christian classroom, just as long as Myer and I can agree that many college students are not yet "mature readers," a point to which literature teachers must remain sensitive when teaching fiction.

12. In some parts of the world, extensive knowledge of fictional works is needed to pass entrance and exit exams or GRE literature exams, and students without this knowledge risk failure.

13. General Conference Department of Education, *A Brief Summary of the Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Schools* (2011): <https://nad-bigtincan.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/curriculum/secondary/secondary%20textbooks/literature%20selection%20guidelines%20for%20secondary%20schools/Literature%20Selection%20Summary.pdf>.

14. Standards of evaluation are essential when searching for true stories. That stories are true does not rule out the potential for bias, inaccuracy, trite themes, poor quality writing, or bad theology.

15. Lindsey Gendke, *Ending the Pain: A True Story of Overcoming Depression* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2016).

16. Desirée Henderson and Amy Tigner are two scholars under whom I studied who

include in their graduate and undergraduate courses a major focus on diaries and Early Modern women's recipe books, respectively. Henderson is the author of *How to Read a Diary: Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st Century Readers* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

17. For those who couldn't read, sometimes life narratives—including the popular genre of slave narratives—were written by an amanuensis. These "as-told-to" narratives also count as Life Writing.

18. *The Book of Margery Kempe, The Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby, The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, The Collected Works of Jupiter Hammon: Poems and Essays*, edited by my professor, Cedrick May (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017), *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings With John Marrant, A Son of the Forest* by William Apess, and the spiritual autobiographies of Elizabeth Ashbridge and Richard Allen are a few of the religious Life Writing texts I read for my studies.

19. Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1915), 448. Italics supplied.





20. \_\_\_\_\_, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 13.



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