

Appendix B: Supplement on Biblical Literacy

The Core Knowledge Foundation provides this appendix in response to many requests for a more comprehensive selection of topics from the Bible than is provided in the Core Knowledge Sequence. The topics listed below are not an integral or required part of a Core Knowledge school program. This list of Biblical topics that are widely alluded to in speech and writing has an educative purpose: it is designed to help students understand these allusions when they encounter them. No reasonable person will interpret this list as intending religious indoctrination.

A distinction needs to be made between teaching the Bible and teaching about the Bible. Teaching the Bible as a guide to faith is the job of the home (if the home so chooses) or church, not the schools. Teaching about the Bible in historical context is something schools can do to help produce literate and historically informed citizens.

Thus, the topics below are suggested for those who want to offer children some familiarity with the Bible as part of their overall cultural literacy. As E. D. Hirsch, Jr. explains in *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (2nd edition, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993),

No one in the English-speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible. ... All educated speakers of American English need to understand what is meant when someone describes a contest as being between David and Goliath, or whether a person who has the "wisdom of Solomon" is wise or foolish, or whether saying "My cup runneth over" means the person feels fortunate or unfortunate. Those who cannot understand such allusions cannot fully participate in literate English.

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 1:

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

Noah's Ark
Moses in the bulrushes, saved by Pharaoh's daughter
Moses and the burning bush
The parting of the Red Sea
The Promised Land

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Mary and Joseph; the birth of Jesus; Bethlehem;
the three wise men (Magi) and their gifts
The parable of the good Samaritan
The "Golden Rule": "Do unto others. . ." [from the

Sermon on the Mount: "All things
whatsoever ye would that men should do to
you, do ye even so to them."]

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 2:

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

The Tower of Babel
Joseph and his coat of many colors
How Joseph saved his family

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The loaves and fishes

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 3:

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

David and Goliath
Jonah and the whale

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The parable of the prodigal son
The parable of the lost sheep

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 4:

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

Joshua conquers Jericho
The story of Ruth ("Whither thou goest, I will go")
Samson and Delilah
The judgment of Solomon
Daniel:
the handwriting on the wall
in the lion's den

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Choosing the disciples; "fishers of men"
Familiar phrases:
the blind leading the blind [Jesus on the
Pharisees: "Can a blind man lead a blind
man?"]
walk on water

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 5:

King James Bible

What it means, literally and figuratively, to cite
“chapter and verse”

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

Creation (Genesis 1-3) “In the beginning”; “Let
there be light”; Garden of Eden; “Be fruitful
and multiply”

Adam and Eve; tree of knowledge of good and
evil, forbidden fruit; fall from Eden; “Dust
thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”

Cain and Abel: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”; mark
of Cain

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The Annunciation; Mary and the angel Gabriel

The Nativity: Luke 2:1-20

John the Baptist

The temptation; “Man shall not live by bread
alone”; “Get thee behind me, Satan”

Raising Lazarus from the dead

Palm Sunday

The Last Supper

Judas

Pilate; washing hands (as a way of disclaiming
responsibility)

Calvary

Crucifixion

Resurrection and appearance to the disciples

Ascension

SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR GRADE 6:

FROM THE HEBREW BIBLE (OLD TESTAMENT):

Noah and the flood (review)

God tests Job

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; Lot’s
wife

The covenant with Abraham: the Promised Land,
Canaan

Abraham and Isaac

Jacob; Esau sells his birthright for “a mess of
pottage”

Joseph

his coat of many colors (review from grade 1)

his brothers sell him into slavery

Potiphar’s wife

he interprets Pharaoh’s dreams

he saves his family

Moses and the burning bush (review from grade 1)

The plagues of Egypt

Passover

The Exodus

The parting of the Red Sea (review from grade 1)

Manna from Heaven

The Ten Commandments

The 23rd Psalm

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (“To everything there is a
season”)

The message of the prophets [such as Isaiah,
Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos]

Familiar phrases:

“an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” [Mosaic
law, Deuteronomy 19:21]

“Physician, heal thyself”

Philistine

“love thy neighbor as thyself” [Leviticus
19:18]

FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The Sermon on the Mount; the Beatitudes
 (“Blessed are . . .”)

Familiar phrases and precepts, such as:

“turn the other cheek”

“Ask, and it shall be given you”

“Cast not pearls before swine”

“go the extra mile”

“Wolves in sheep’s clothing”

“No man can serve two masters . . . Ye cannot
serve God and Mammon”

“the salt of the earth”

“Consider the lilies of the field”

“Love your enemies”

“Judge not, that ye be not judged”

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon
earth, where moth and rust doth
corrupt”

OTHER FAMILIAR PHRASES:

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,
and to God the things that are God’s”

the straight and narrow [see Matthew 7:14]
cast the first stone [John 8:7]

“Faith hope and charity”; “through a glass,
darkly” [Paul, I Corinthians 13:1-13]

“the love of money is the root of all evil” [1
Timothy 6:10]

“swords into plowshares”

“wolf also shall dwell with the lamb”