



Faith & Literature – Syllabus

Course Description: Throughout the centuries, Christians have applied themselves to a wealth of creative outlets—the visual arts, music, and certainly, literary writing. In this course, students will explore some of the greatest faith-based works from Lewis to Hugo, exploring fiction, poetry, and hymns. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the works, exercise critical thinking, apply Biblical insight, and even respond creatively to their own comfort level.

Course Outline:

Week One: Introduction, Approaches to Faith in Literature - *Gilead*

Week Two: Approaches to Faith in Literature, *continued* - *Gilead*

Week Three: Considering Literary Style & Faith - O'Connor or Lewis

Week Four: Redemption in Literature - Hugo, Lewis

Week Five: Faith in Poetry - Tennyson, Herbert, Hopkins, Hymns

Week Six: Superficial Faith in Literature - Browning, Austen

Week Seven: Faith in Fantasy - *A Wrinkle in Time* or a *Narnia* novel

Week Eight: Faith in Fantasy, *continued*

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Advanced Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.

Goal & Statement of Purpose:

This course has three goals:

1. Meditation on the nature of God via literature
2. Awareness of the ways in which literary writing can impact faith and be used as an act of worship
3. Strengthening of personal faith through an understanding of various discussions of the Christian faith

The course approaches faith in literature from a Christian perspective, founded on a belief in the Biblical Gospel, but not from a particular denomination or individual subset of Christian beliefs (e.g. Calvinism or Arminianism). Our goal is that any student can achieve the class goals while discovering new ways to honor and contemplate God through literature.

Required Texts:

The student should have access to the following works.

Note on content: *While we always strive to pick clean and uplifting works, some highly valuable texts result from cultural backgrounds that involve some negative or challenging content. Therefore, we recommend that a parent or guardian at least briefly review works and reach out if they would like to substitute a work that matches their family values.*

Week 1-2: Introduction, Approaches to Faith in Literature

Reading: Marilynne Robinson, *Gilead*

Week 3: Considering Literary Style & Faith

Reading: Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation" (Short story; available online or in a short story collection) OR C.S. Lewis' "Essay on Forgiveness," (PDF attached) depending on family and/or student preference

Note: *As O'Connor writes jarringly about her faith, and as this short story follows an individual who self-righteously judges others based on appearances, some characters are referred to by slurs. I highly recommend that a family member review O'Connor's story before selecting it for their student. Lewis' essay dwells on similar themes, but from a nonfiction perspective.*

Week 4: Redemption in Literature

Reading: Excerpt from *Les Misérables* (A collection of short chapters recounting the Bishop and Valjean: Chapters XIII, “What He Believed”; XIV, “What He Thought”; III, “The Heroism of Passive Obedience”; X “The Man Awakes”; XI, “What He Does”; XII, “The Bishop at Work”; XIII, “Petit Gervais”)

Reading: C.S. Lewis, “As the Ruin Falls” (available online)

Week 5: Faith in Poetry

Reading: The following poems –

Healthy Doubt: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Excerpts from *In Memoriam* (96 & “Epilogue,” PDF provided)

Renaissance Faith: George Herbert, “The Altar” (PDF provided)

God and Nature: Irina Ratushinskaya, “Believe Me” (PDF provided)

& Hymns as Poetry (Available online or in collections of hymns):

Fanny Crosby, “A message of mercy, a message of love”

Hermann Baer, “Amazing Grace”

Week 6: Superficial Faith in Literature

Reading: Browning, Excerpts from “Fra Lippo Lippi” (PDF provided) & “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” (PDF provided)

Reading: Austen, excerpt from *Pride & Prejudice* featuring Mr. Collins (PDF provided)

Week 7-8: Faith in Fantasy

Reading: Students may select either *A Wrinkle in Time* or one *Narnia* book of their choice

There is no required edition; the student must simply cite the edition used. **Please make sure that your copy of the text is not abridged.** Other works will be provided in PDF format to the students, although students are more than welcome to find their own print copies!

If possible, we recommend that students interact with the text (highlighting and marginal notes), but students are *not* required to own copies of the works—texts from the library are perfectly all right! If you would like to own a particular text, inexpensive copies can be found online and at used bookstores.

As students tend to experience stronger reading comprehension when not reading on a screen, we would also highly recommend that students have access to a hard copy of the works (a printed out PDF works well, too!).