

Sample Lesson Plan for Teaching the Cultural and Historical Aspects of the Bible for Public Schools

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Note: this is a programmed learning approach suitable for all ages. It is presented in a Q&A format. There is no attempt or intention to convince students of the veracity of the contents of the Bible, but simply to provide historical and literary information about its content, origins, and influence on Western culture.

1. What is the Bible? A collection of 66 books consisting of writings by many authors during a period of over a thousand years.
2. What are the two main parts of the Bible? The Old Testament and the New Testaments.
3. Who decided what writings would become books within the Bible? The Old Testament books were select by Jewish scholars. The New Testament books were selected by Christian church leaders and scholars.
4. What Scriptures did Jesus read? Mostly books from the Old Testament.
5. When were the books of the New Testament decided on? Generally, around the 4th century AD.
6. What do BC and AD stand for? BC stands for “before Christ.” AD stands for “anno domini” Latin for “in the year of our Lord.”. Sometimes you see BCE and CE which designate “before current era and current era.” These designations allow the writer to not use religious connotations when relaying dates.
7. When was the calendar division of years BC and AD decided? Everyone seemed to have their own method of describing events from different points in history. It was generally around 1000 AD. When Western culture became more dominant, most people used the BC and AD dating system based on what was considered a pivotal date, the year Jesus was born, which seems to be accurate within a few years.
8. Why did so many people agree on this dating system? Why of all people was it Jesus Christ’s birth that was chosen to create our current calendars? The Christian church was very influential after the fall of the latest worldwide empire, that of the Romans. Christianity became a major worldwide religion, so their system of dating was widely accepted.
9. What are the first and last books of the Bible? Genesis and Revelation.
10. What are the first 5 books of the Bible and who wrote them? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, sometimes called the Torah, are generally attributed to Moses who lived for 120 years around the 14th and 13th centuries BCE.
11. What are these books about? Genesis describes the creation of the world and Adam and Eve, the first humans according to this religious tradition. It also describes a worldwide flood that destroyed everyone except for Noah and his family. It tells the story of Abraham who is the patriarch of the Jewish nation and religion, Exodus tells the story how Moses rescued the Jewish people who were enslaved by the Egyptian empire in North Africa. He led them to “the promised land” which is where most of Palestine is

today. Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are three books consisting mostly of the various laws that the Jewish people were supposed to live by.

12. What is the rest of the Old Testament about? The rest of the books are generally divided between the history of the Jewish nation, poetical books, and books of prophecy.
13. Can you give me examples of these other books? The books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles describe the various leaders of Israel, descended from Abraham and his 12 greatgrandchildren for whom the 12 tribes of Israel are named. His son Isaac was father of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel meaning he who struggles with God. Israel had 12 sons. When the 12 tribes were led into the Promised Land by Joshua they formed a large kingdom eventually led by David and his son Solomon.
14. What are some of the poetical books? The book of Job tells the story of a person who was very rich but lost everything in a bet between God and Satan. God was bragging on Job until Satan challenged him by saying Job was good only because you gave him great wealth. Take it away and he will curse you. Job passed the test. The book of Psalms are praises to God written mostly by King David. The book of Proverbs is attributed to David's son Solomon who was considered a very wise person.
15. What about the books of prophecy? They are divided between major and minor prophets based on the length of the books. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are considered the major prophets who not only sometimes predicted the future, but criticized the nation when they disobeyed God's commandments known as The Law.
16. What are the first four books of the New Testament? These are called the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They are descriptions of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, his hometown.
17. What is the book of Acts about? It describes the history of the church that grew up after Jesus was killed and according to the Bible, resurrected and appeared to his followers. He then returned to heaven from which he came when he was born as a little child in Bethlehem, a small city outside of Jerusalem.
18. What is the Apostles Creed? Based on biblical concepts, it is a document decided on by church leaders and expresses the beliefs of Christians about the life and death of Jesus and his promise to return to Earth.
19. What are the other books of the New Testament? They are called epistles or letters to the various churches that were founded around the Mediterranean Sea near Turkey and Greece. Most of them were written by St. Paul.
20. What is the book of Revelation about? It is a book written by John with messages from Jesus to seven churches and contains a description of how the world will end.
21. Why is the Bible such an important book? There are many reasons. It was widely read by many people throughout the world and is widely referenced in Western literature. Many important historical figures valued it highly.

Originally The Bible was difficult to obtain until the invention of the printing press around 1440 AD by Gutenberg in Germany. Until then literacy was low and only scholars could read the Bible in its original languages of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, or in its Latin translations.

Many believed that the Roman Catholic Church needed reforming and in the 1500s AD several priests began the Reformation including Luther, Calvin, and others. The printing press made it easier for ordinary people to get a copy of the Bible or parts of it and read it for themselves in

their own language. Translators were often persecuted or killed such as Wycliff, Tyndale, and Luther.

In 1611, James, a King of England, authorized a Bible translation into English that was widely used throughout the English-speaking world. It was known as the King James Version, or KJV. Since then, many more modern translations have been made. It is the largest selling book of all time estimated in the 5-7 billion range. It's influence in the world can't be overestimated, but it is safe to say that most educated people should have some knowledge of its contents and origins whether or not they believe the stories it contains. This is the reason for this brief syllabus which can be used as a springboard to further independent study.

What makes the Bible so unique is the claims of its main character Jesus. As a carpenter from Nazareth, a little town in historic Judea, he made the unlikely claim to be the Messiah predicted and expected by the Jewish nation. As the Messiah, his life fulfilled many of the prophecies about him. He claimed to be the only begotten son of God and the only pathway into heaven from which he came. The Gospels claim that he created the world and would come back to judge "the living and the dead." His death as a criminal by the Roman authorities, Jesus claimed, was a deliberate surrendering of his life as a payment for the sins of the world thus allowing the reconciliation of God's creatures with their Creator.

There are many great religious figures throughout history and from many different traditions, but the claims of Jesus are truly unique leading someone to remark that he was either a liar, lunatic, or what he claimed to be: the Lord of heaven and earth. Regardless, of how one comes down on that issue, an educated person today should have at least some familiarity with the book that has had such profound influence on world history.

Suggestions for teachers: After going through the Q&A, students might be requested to read particular passages from the Bible such as the creation story in Genesis, the story of the flood. God's bet with Satan over Job might spark a discussion of the theodicy question: why bad things happen to good people. Moses confrontation with Pharaoh, how Moses got the 10 commandments, etc., these texts are easily found by asking Google search for their location in the Bible.

A selection from the book of Proverbs is always interesting as are passages from Ecclesiastes such as "there is a time for everything" on which the popular folk song "Turn, Turn" was based. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 are sure to spark discussion. As are the last few chapters of Revelation.

Remember, the object is not to convince anyone of anything, only to make people aware of some aspects of what is admittedly a most important book in world history.

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