

A Brief Summary of the Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Schools

*“The great aim of the teacher should be the perfecting of Christian character in himself and in his students.”
Council to Parents and Teacher p. 68*

Literature selected in Seventh-day Adventist schools should . . .

- Tend to draw the reader to Christ.
- Lead to the development of the whole person.
- Give a comprehensive view of the universe
- Help solve fundamental problems.
- Answer questions on the origin, nature, and destiny of humankind.
- Emphasize the true, the honest, and the beautiful.
- Give primary emphasis to character-building.
- Transmit the spiritual ideas, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the Church.
- Encourage students to be thoughtful, law-abiding citizens and loyal, conscientious Christians.

The study of secular literature, carefully guided and studied with a sober regard to the positive principles set forth in Holy Scripture and emphasized in Ellen G. White’s writings, is legitimate for Seventh-day Adventist schools. However, it should . . .

- Be serious art that will lead to significant insights into human nature and will be compatible with Adventist values.
- Avoid sensationalism and maudlin sentimentality.
- Not be characterized by profanity or other crude and offensive language.
- Avoid elements that give the appearance of making evil desirable or goodness appear trivial.
- Avoid simplified, excitingly suspenseful, or plot-dominated stories that encourage hasty and superficial reading.
- Be adapted to the maturity level of the group or individual.

Fictional literature should NOT be . . .

- Addictive.
- Sentimental, sensational, erotic, profane, or trashy.
- Escapist, causing the reader to revert to a dream world and to be less able to cope with problems of everyday life.
- A distraction from serious study and devotional life.
- Time consuming and valueless.

Teachers of literature in Seventh-day Adventist schools should . . .

- Choose materials and teaching methods designed to encourage the development of mature Christian students, committed to the search for wisdom and truth and concerned with the physical and spiritual well-being of humanity.
- Assist students in discovering the present-day relevance of Biblical literature and the writings of Ellen G. White.
- Include materials that sharpen perceptions, provide fresh insights, and challenge values that students have accepted or held without critical examination.
- Include literature which reflects and nourishes the ethnically diverse character of our society.
- Consider the Adventist constituency of the school, the homes from which the students come, and most importantly the students themselves when choosing material.
- Provide optional acceptable reading to those whose interpretation of the Spirit of Prophecy or Biblical principles differ from those given here.

Adapted from the *Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Schools*
prepared by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
(See: following pages for more information)

Guide to the Teaching of Literature in Seventh-day Adventist Schools

INTRODUCTION

The question of literature and its use in the Seventh-day Adventist classroom is perennially discussed at teachers' conventions and especially among those in whose classes it is presented. In an attempt to further clarify the church's position, a committee representative of the various segments of Adventist education spent a full week in study of the topic.

The statement prepared by this committee was recommended to the General Conference Department of Education and to the Autumn Council, where after some minor changes, it was accepted and referred back to the Department of Education for implementation.

The contents of these "Guidelines" are based on the accepted statement, and are intended to give direction to the teaching of literature in our schools.

"The great aim of the teacher should be the perfecting of Christian character in himself and in his students. Teachers, let your lamps be trimmed and burning, and they will not only be lights to your students, but will send out clear and distinct rays to the homes and neighborhoods where your students live, and far beyond into the moral darkness of the world."—*Counsels to Parents and Teachers*, page 68.

I. Philosophy

Literature in general sets forth man's impressions of his world, as well as his aspirations, deeds, thoughts, and accomplishments, whether good or bad. Literature selected, in particular for Seventh-day Adventist schools, should lead to the development of the whole man. It may be expressed through poetry or prose; it may be factual or non-factual; it may be drawn from secular or religious sources. It will give a comprehensive view of the universe, help solve fundamental problems, and answer questions on the origin, nature, and destiny of man while emphasizing the true, the honest, and the beautiful.

The study of literature should support the fundamental premise that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the earth and the entire universe and is the Source of all knowledge and wisdom. The presentation of literature should confirm the truth that God created man in His image and help restore that image by developing faith in Christ. It should nurture an intelligent dedication to the work of God and develop a desire to serve mankind.

Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy holds that acquaintance with God can best be obtained through divine revelations of His nature and purposes. The objectives of the teaching of literature in Seventh-day Adventist schools will therefore be

in harmony with those revelations, particularly as vouchsafed in Holy Scripture and emphasized in the writings of Ellen G. White.

The teaching of literature in Seventh-day Adventist schools should give primary emphasis to character-building. It should transmit to the students the spiritual ideals, beliefs, attitudes, and values of the church, and furthermore should encourage them to be thoughtful, law-abiding citizens as well as loyal, conscientious Christians.

Careful study of Ellen G. White's counsels and her total relationship to reading principles indicates that guided study of secular literature, both the fact-based and some true-to-principle non-fact-based, is legitimate for Seventh-day Adventist schools. It should be studied with a sober regard to the positive principles set forth in Mrs. White's writings.

Acceptable literature, whatever its form, is serious art and should be taught in such a manner that students will become vividly aware of its aesthetic qualities—its beauty of word and structure, of rhythm and rhyme, of light and shade. The teacher should share with his students an innate and cultivated love of the best in literature that they might learn to appreciate the highest and to employ its principles in their own literary endeavors.

II. Selection of Literature for Seventh-day Adventist Schools

A. *Function*

The function of literature selected for study in Seventh-day Adventist schools is to acquaint the student with the artistic wealth available in all forms of the written word. Literature is designed to provide significant, artistic, lasting insights into essential human experience. It develops an appreciation and emulation of the beauty of language and the art of literary structure. The study of literature confronts the student with reality, explores significant questions, and introduces ideas in their historical context. It provides a basis for developing discriminatory powers and encourages the students to emulate the skills demonstrated by selections studied. It should tend to draw the reader to Christ, build up and strengthen understanding and faith, and help him to become a whole spiritual man.

B. *Criteria*

1. General

Literature assigned in Seventh-day Adventist schools should:

- a. Be serious art. It will lead to significant insight into the nature of man in society and will be compatible with Seventh-day Adventist values.

- b. Avoid sensationalism (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).
- c. Not be characterized by profanity or other crude and offensive language.
- d. Avoid elements that give the appearance of making evil desirable or goodness appear trivial.
- e. Avoid simplified, excitingly suspenseful, or plot-dominated stories that encourage hasty and superficial reading.
- f. Be adapted to the maturity level of the group or individual.

2. Fiction

Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, Second Edition, Unabridged, defines *fiction* broadly as: "That which is feigned, invented, or imagined; esp., a feigned or invented story, whether uttered or written with intent to deceive or not;--opposed to fact or reality. Fictitious literature; all works of imagination in narrative or dramatic form; specif., novels & romances ..." In the minds of many the term *fiction* denotes less broadly the perverted, harmful form of imaginative writings often designed to exalt sin and sordidness. In most literary circles the term *fiction* has been understood merely to mean the categories of the novel and the short story.

From an intensive examination of her references to fiction, it appears that Ellen G. White used the term *fiction* to apply to works with the following characteristics: (1) It is addictive. (2) It may be sentimental, or sensational, erotic, profane, or trashy. (3) It is escapist, causing the reader to revert to a dream world and to be less able to cope with the problems of everyday life. (4) It unfits the mind for serious study, and devotional life. (5) It is time consuming and valueless.

Ellen G. White, while characterizing objectionable literature, recognized a proper limited use of certain non-factual materials by her endorsement of *Pilgrim's Progress* and by including in her compilation of *Sabbath Readings* (1877-1878) such materials in the form of simple stories teaching "moral and religious" lessons "that defend a sound morality and breathe a spirit of devotion, tenderness and true piety", at the same time specifying their value in contrast with "religious fiction" which had proved to be a curse.

In the selection of literary material the counsel of Ellen White should be followed in avoiding materials marked by the characteristics she attributed to fiction. Within these limitations some non-factual works, catalogued commonly as fiction, might be appropriately taught.

3. Biographies

Biographies may include the lives of persons whose religious views or personal lives are unworthy of emulation, as well as much novel or imaginative presentation.

All biographical selections are to be chosen with caution, and the same guidelines as recommended for other reading material be followed.

4. Glorification of Authors

The inspired word of the Spirit of Prophecy has given counsel to refrain from glorifying the authors of literary works (see *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp 173, 174.) It is recognized that certain undevout and ungodly authors have sometimes embodied in their writings gems of wisdom and truth and have written some things which express cultural, moral, and aesthetic values, and, “We can trace the line of the world’s teachers as far back as human records extend; but the Light was before them. As the moon and the stars of our solar system shine by the reflected light of the sun, so, as far as their teaching is true, do the world’s great thinkers reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Every gleam of thought, every flash of the intellect, is from the Light of the world.”—*Education*, pp. 13, 14.

Since admonition has been given to teach students how to choose the good, and to refuse the evil, in the teaching of literature primary emphasis should be placed upon the values, insights, and understandings to be found in the literature itself, avoiding the glorification of authors in any way.

5. Relevance

Present-day students are particularly concerned that their studies should be relevant to their experience and interests. Recognizing that, besides its traditionally appreciated values, literary study can promote understandings that may be useful for problem solving and for coping with personal and cultural change. The following criteria should be considered:

- a. Teachers of literature in Adventist schools should build on the premise that both selection of materials and methods of teaching be governed by relevance to the development of students into mature Adventist Christians, committed to the search for wisdom and truth and concerned with the physical and spiritual well-being of their fellow men.

- b. Teachers of literature should assist students to discover the relevance of the literature of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White to present-day concerns.
- c. Adventist schools (particularly on the higher level), recognizing students' interest in currently pressing human problems, may include in their literature program such materials as encourage sharpened perceptions and fresh insights and challenge values that students have accepted or held without critical examination. The teacher's judicious attitude toward such material and candid explanation should reveal to students its usefulness for such higher values as perception and insight despite certain drawbacks. The teachers should inform administrators about the purposes and approaches involved in the use of such material. Appropriateness of topics and materials to the age of the student and harmony with the philosophy expressed in this document must always be important considerations.

6. Individual Student Conviction

In view of the fact that some students come to SDA classrooms with deep conscientious convictions about the kinds of assignments they may or may not accept, every effort should be made by all teachers of literature to provide optional acceptable reading on related topics for these students so that no one be embarrassed because of his individual interpretation of Spirit of Prophecy quotations.

C. Role of the Teacher

The teacher of literature in a Seventh-day Adventist school will be thoroughly dedicated to the beliefs and ideals of the church and will exemplify these in his personal and professional life. He will be concerned with the salvation of his students and the glorification of God. The teacher will use materials and methods to assist students in attaining the highest goals God has designed for man. He will be selective in his choice of assignments, and his methods of teaching will instill in each student those principles set forth in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. He will remember that truth is best communicated in a setting of love, compassion, beauty, and simplicity. He will take into consideration the Adventist constituency in which he teaches, the homes from which the students come, most importantly the students themselves, adapting to their needs.

In attempting to solve his professional problems, the teacher should counsel with his colleagues, and in case of doubt on certain reading material to be