



Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word

Part 1 of a 4-Part Series

Copyright © 2010 by Michael B. Essenburg

All rights reserved.

Reprints may be made for workshops

facilitated by the purchaser or held at the purchaser's place of employment.

Table of contents

Facilitator guides

| | |
|--|---|
| Help your students connect God's world and Word | 1 |
| Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject | 2 |
| What makes a good facilitator good? | 3 |
| Frequently asked questions | 4 |
| My plan for facilitating Session # _____ | 5 |

Session guides and readings

| | |
|--|----|
| Session 1: What do you want your students to learn? | 6 |
| Reading 1: Help your students learn 3 things | 7 |
| Session 2: How important is it to help your students connect God's world and Word? | 8 |
| Reading 2: Help your students habitually connect God's world and Word | 9 |
| Session 3: What does/doesn't connecting God's world and Word look like? | 10 |
| Reading 3: What's happening? What's not happening? | 11 |
| Session 4: How does God's Word connect to the part of God's world your students study? | 12 |
| Reading 4: Have students connect relevant biblical principles to what they study | 13 |
| Session 5: How can you get your students more engaged in connecting God's world and Word? | 14 |
| Reading 5: To engage your students, have them learn new things | 15 |
| Session 6: How can you help your students connect God's world and Word? | 16 |
| Reading 6: Teach a lesson that helps your students make connections | 17 |
| Session 7: How committed are you to helping your students connect God's world and Word? | 18 |
| Reading 7: Increase your commitment | 19 |

What can you do to get started using this kit?

- Look at the session guide, noting the title and goal of each session.
- Read "Session 1: What do you want your students to learn?" (page 6) and "Reading 1: Help your students learn 3 things" (page 7).
- Read through the facilitator guides, especially "Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject" (page 2) and "Frequently asked questions" (page 4).

Help your students connect God's world and Word

You want your students to connect the part of God's world they study and biblical principles. This is a significant challenge. Want some help?

These 7 sessions will help you address this challenge. As a result of working through the 7 discussion-based sessions, you will...

1. Evaluate and improve how you help your students connect God's world and Word.
2. Analyze and explain the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word.
3. Identify and explain what connecting what God's world and Word looks like.
4. Document biblical principles you want your students to connect to the part of God's world they are studying.
5. Get your students even more engaged in connecting God's world and Word by having your students learn new biblical principles and/or helping your students make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.
6. Prepare for and teach a lesson designed to help your students connect God's world and Word.
7. Increase your commitment to helping your students connect God's world and Word.

I would enjoy learning about how you are helping your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at [<learnmore@closethegapnow.org>](mailto:learnmore@closethegapnow.org).

—**Michael B. Essenburg**



Michael

I'm passionate about helping students connect God's world and Word.

Key ways to do this include targeting connections, using assessments, using questions, and meeting student learning needs.

Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject

We want our students to connect God's world and Word. When 5th graders study health, we're excited to see them write things like, "The first step in being healthy is to have a good relationship with God." And when 10th graders study racism as portrayed in *Night* (a Holocaust memoir), we feel good to see them write things like, "I have no right to choose whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

What's our goal? To have each of our students proficiently connect God's world and Word in each subject.

What helps teachers achieve this goal? Having their learning needs met, for example:

1. Getting support, encouragement, and accountability.
2. Experiencing engaging instruction.
3. Having time to reflect on the importance of helping students make connections and on how to help students make connections.
4. Having concrete examples of how students are connecting God's world and Word. And having concrete examples of how other teachers help their students connect God's world and Word.
5. Having repeated opportunities to apply their learning.

These materials (part of a 4-part series) are designed to help teachers achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. In each session (suggested length of 60 minutes), teachers will:

1. Support each other as they report on progress they've made on their action steps.
2. Read about and discuss a key question like "What do you want your students to learn?"
3. Commit to action steps they will take before the next session in order to help students connect God's world and Word.
4. Pray for each other.

What helps administrators achieve this goal? Being able to provide professional development that results in each teacher helping each student to connect God's world and Word. And being able to provide professional development that is cost-effective, easy to set up, easy to facilitate, and aligned with accreditation standards.

These materials are designed to help administrators achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. To use these materials, no outside expert needs to be called in. Instead, an administrator or a classroom teacher can serve as facilitator. To use these materials, no extensive preparation is required—the facilitator can just review the materials, make copies of the session guide and reading, and use the guide to help participants move through the session. And to use these materials, no big blocks of time have to be set aside. Instead, smaller blocks of time (say, 60 minutes) can be scheduled over several weeks.

Take action: Help each student proficiently connect God's world and Word. You can do this by reviewing the materials, using the assessment in Session 1 to determine which sessions to include, finding a facilitator, developing a schedule, and inviting teachers to participate.

What makes a good facilitator good?

A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, from beliefs about growth:

1. *God is growing His people, and the Holy Spirit is at work in each believer.* God is already at work in the lives of each of His people. While God may use me to help a person grow, it's God who is actually growing each of His people. As a facilitator, I encourage each person to listen to God.
2. *People want to grow and are empowered to grow by those who believe in them.* You and I both want to grow. And people who believe in us empower us to grow. I know this. I've experienced it in my own life. You have, too. When people believe in me, I can do more. As a facilitator, I believe in people. So, I listen (instead of talking), ask questions (instead of advising), and encourage (instead of critiquing). Remember, Barnabas believed in Paul.
3. *Growing is more about motivation than information.* We all know good things that would help us grow. We know we should do these good things—but we don't. Simply put, knowing doesn't equal doing. As a facilitator, I empower people to focus on good things they want to work on.
4. *People grow as they take responsibility by defining, committing to, and achieving goals.* So as a facilitator, I don't take the responsibility for defining goals; instead, I empower people to define their goals. I don't take the responsibility for committing to goals; instead, I empower people to commit to their goals. I don't take the responsibility for achieving the goals; instead, I empower people to achieve their goals. Make sense?

Based on these beliefs, a good facilitator uses key skills to help others grow:

1. *A good facilitator listens* (instead of talking). He gives his full attention to what others are saying, looks interested, sounds interested, and targets understanding (not judging). He listens a minimum of 80% of the time.
2. *A good facilitator inquires to provoke reflection* (instead of advising). He asks questions ("What helps students make connections?"), makes inviting statements ("Tell me more about...."), and recognizes that effective inquiry means that others talk at least 80% of the time.
3. *A good facilitator focuses others* on achieving the session goal and on determining and achieving their own action steps (instead of suggesting action steps).
4. *A good facilitator encourages others* (instead of critiquing). He does this by asking for clarification ("What do you mean by...?"), by giving affirmation, and by restating things ("So, you're saying....").

Finally, a good facilitator prepares. Before each session, he makes sure he understands the significance of the session title and the goal, familiarizes himself with the session content, determines the length of the session (I suggest 60 minutes), makes photocopies and room arrangements, and develops a facilitation plan (see page 4).

So, what makes a good facilitator good? A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, uses key skills, and prepares. Why? In order to empower participants to take action to help their students connect God's world and Word.

Take action: Find ways to provide more effective facilitation. You can do this by assessing how you're doing as a facilitator, talking with a colleague, and determining 2 action steps you will take.

Frequently asked questions

- 1. What's the thinking behind the sequence of the sessions?**
Session 1 provides an overview and includes a self-assessment. Sessions 2-6 unpack the self-assessment in Session 1. Session 7 targets commitment.
- 2. Do participants need to do the sessions in order?**
Generally speaking, sessions should be completed in order. But the bottom line is to do the sessions in whatever order helps participants help students connect God's world and Word.
- 3. Do participants need to do all sessions?**
No. Participants only need to do the sessions that help them move forward on helping students connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. If the self-assessment data from Session 1 indicates that participants don't need to complete a given session, then consider skipping that session.
- 4. What's the recommended number of participants?**
You need enough participants to have good interaction and not so many that it feels impersonal. The number of participants could be from 2 to 20. I recommend 6 or more.
- 5. How long should each session be?**
As long as it takes for participants to report on previous action steps, reflect on the session goal, and commit to new action steps that target the session goal. I suggest 60 minutes per session. Here's a sample schedule for a 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).
- 6. How much time should there be between sessions?**
Enough time for participants to carry out their action steps. I suggest one week.
- 7. What's the thinking behind the structure of the session guides?**
The structure is designed to help teachers apply what they learn. Teachers move from reporting on action steps, to learning, to committing to action. The structure works well for professional learning communities.
- 8. What modifications can the facilitator make to the session guides?**
The facilitator can make whatever modifications will help participants move forward on helping students connect God's world and Word. For example, the facilitator can delete questions, include an additional reading, or show a video.
- 9. What's the thinking behind the sequence of discussion questions in the session guides?**
The discussion questions follow a set sequence. The questions start with facts, move to feelings and experiences, then move to analysis, and conclude with commitment to action.
- 10. Do participants need to discuss all the questions in each session guide?**
No. The questions are designed to get participants talking, to help participants think about the session question, and to help participants make progress on the session goal. If the participants can do this without discussing certain questions, then don't have them discuss those questions.
- 11. In what sequence should the 4 parts of this series be used?**
The 4 parts of this series should be used in whatever sequence helps participants help students connect God's world and Word. Here's one sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (2) *Use Assessment*, (3) *Use Questions*, and (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*. Here's another sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (3) *Use Questions*, (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*, and (2) *Use Assessment*.
- 12. What's the bottom line?**
The bottom line is to get teachers to take action, to do something to help students connect God's world and Word. If teachers can achieve the bottom line more easily without using these materials, don't use them.

My plan for facilitating Session # _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ - _____ Location: _____

Session content (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I understand the significance of the session title and the goal.
- ☐ I have familiarized myself with the session content by reading through the session guide and reading.

Logistics (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I have reserved a place to meet.
- ☐ I have enough desks/chairs.
- ☐ I have enough copies of the session guide and reading.
- ☐ I have informed the participants of things they need to bring.
- ☐ I have selected a seating arrangement.
 - ☐ A circle ☐ Groups of 2-4
 - ☐ A U-shape ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Facilitation plan: Fill in times, select the group size, and select an option.

| Time | Section | Group size | Options |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| _____ - _____ | Connect with others | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| _____ - _____ | Focus on this session's goal | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> Read the goal aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| _____ - _____ | Read | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> One person reads aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Take turns reading aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Read silently <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| _____ - _____ | Discuss the reading | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| _____ - _____ | Commit to action | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

**Suggested times for 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).*

Session 1: What do you want your students to learn?

Connect with a colleague

1. In your classes, what is one thing that's going well?
2. What is one character trait you want your students to have?
3. What is one thing you want your students to learn?

Focus on this session's goal

To evaluate and improve how you help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

As a result of Christian education, we want students to be people who love God and live for Him. To explore what students need to learn in order to be that type of people, read "Reading 1: Help your students learn 3 things."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is satisfying/unsatisfying about helping your students learn about God's world and how people are using it? learn about God's Word? learn about the connections between God's world and Word?

Find ways you can help your students make connections

To find ways to help your students connect God's world and Word, take this self-assessment. Rate each item, using the following scale:

4: *Strongly agree* • 3: *Agree* • 2: *Disagree* • 1: *Strongly disagree*

- ___ 1. I can readily explain the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 2. I can readily explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like.
- ___ 3. I have documented the biblical principles I want my students to connect to the part of God's world they study in my class(es).
- ___ 4. I regularly have my students learn new biblical principles and/or help my students make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.
- ___ 5. I regularly teach lessons designed to help my students connect God's world and Word.

Reflect on your self-assessment data with a colleague

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do you have?
2. What excites/concerns you about your data?
3. To help your students make better connections, what is one self-assessment item on which you want to make progress? What are your reasons for selecting that item?
4. What 3 or more things could you do to make progress on that item?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to improve how you help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 1: Help your students learn 3 things

Interview with Michael Essenburg, school improvement coordinator at Christian Academy in Japan

What kind of people do you want your students to be?

Michael: I want students to be people who love God and live for Him. I want students to be people who live out a Christian worldview as they love their neighbors, care for God's creation, share the Gospel, and participate in the Church. I want students to be people of God, to be people of love, truth, peace, justice, and mercy.

To be that kind of people, what do your students need to learn?

Michael: I want students to learn 3 things. I want them to learn about God's world and how people are using it, about God's Word, and about the connections between God's world and Word.

Let me ask you about those 3 things: (1) What do you want your students to learn about God's world and how people use it?

Michael: I want them to learn about science, music, language, history, and literature. I want them to learn to read and write, to play basketball and badminton, to add and subtract, to draw and paint. I want them to learn about child abuse, media manipulation, nihilism, pollution, discrimination, wealth, and poverty.

(2) What do you want your students to learn about God's Word?

Michael: I want them to learn that God created a good world, that we sinned, that sin messed up everything, that Jesus died to save us, and that as redeemed people, we can join God in restoring His world.

I want them to learn that they should care for God's creation, love God and others, make disciples, and participate in the body of Christ. I want them to learn that we are to be content with what God provides and that God's Word is true.

(3) What do you want your students to learn about the connections between God's world and Word?

Michael: First, I want them to learn that God's world and Word *are* connected. Then, I want them to learn about the connections between the part of God's world they study and God's Word. Here's an example of what a 10th grader learned about the connections between existentialism as presented in Camus's "The Guest" and biblical teaching about truth:

"In contrast to what Camus and Daru experienced, there is inherent meaning and moral guidelines in life given by God.... Truth, which is God's teaching, is apparent everywhere...(Rom. 1.20). In fact, the truth of the only God is accessible...(Acts 17.20). We must learn what God's truth is and apply it to our lives because as Daru understood, human wisdom is faulty.... Humans must establish God's truth as their anchor and base their decisions on His truth, which may not yield the obviously 'good' consequences in this life, but are right because they are part of God's perfect will."

Now what?

Michael: I want you to find ways to help your students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading, by taking a self-assessment on how you help students make connections, and by using your self-assessment data to identify 2 or more action steps you will take to help your students make connections.



Kim, English 10

I want my students to love Jesus. I want them to be joyful, inquisitive, thoughtful people who connect what they learn with their lives.

Through their study of English, I want my students to learn that God created a good world so that we could enjoy it and participate in developing its potential. I want my students to learn that in this fallen world, God calls us to join Him in working to restore peace and justice. Language helps us understand God's truth and share it with others.

Session 2: How important is it to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is something that happened recently in class that made you smile?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you think is vital in Christian education?

Focus on this session's goal

To analyze and explain the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word.

Read

In Christian education, it's vital to help students be people who love God and live for Him, to be people who live out a Christian worldview, to be people of God. A key way to help students be people of God is to help them habitually connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. To think further about this, read "Reading 2: Help your students habitually connect God's world and Word."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is encouraging/discouraging about helping your students habitually connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word?
3. How does making/not making connections impact your students' ability to live for God 24/7?
4. How important is it for your students to habitually connect what they study to biblical principles? What happens if your students don't connect what they study to biblical principles?
5. How important is it for your students to be able to think through difficult questions? What happens if your students can't think through difficult questions?
6. How important is it for your students to believe that the Bible connects to what they study at school? What happens if your students believe this?
7. What can you do to get better at explaining the importance of helping your students connect God's world and Word?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further analyze and explain the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 2: Help your students habitually connect God's world and Word

Question: What is vital in Christian education?

Answer: It's vital to help students be people who love God and live for Him. It's vital to help students be people who live out a Christian worldview as they love their neighbors, care for God's creation, share the Gospel, and participate in the Church. It's vital for students to be people of God, to be people of love, truth, peace, justice, and mercy.

Question: So, how important is it for students to connect God's world and Word?

Answer: It's vital. It's vital because connecting God's world and Word helps students love God, live for Him, follow His commands, and be His people 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Students face and are going to face challenges in all aspects of life. It's vital that they habitually connect the Bible to everything—what they learn, challenges at work, difficult family situations, everything.

If students don't habitually connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word, they're more likely to separate God from His creation, to separate Sunday from Monday. If they don't make connections, they're more likely to have trouble living out their faith in the real world. If they don't make connections between God's world and Word, they're going to struggle to be God's people 24/7.

Here's a real story that describes what I don't want to see happen: A high school student talks with her English teacher about a book she has read. The teacher asks, "What is the theme of the book?" The student says, "It's about friendship and how giving your life for someone is the ultimate act of love." The teacher responds, "What's a biblical perspective of the book?" And the student says, "The book didn't talk about God, so I don't think there's a biblical perspective."

So let me ask you 3 questions to help you reflect on the importance of helping students habitually connect God's world and Word:

1. *How important is it for your students to connect what they study to biblical principles?* Here are some sample principles: God wants us to seek to get along with others (Matt. 7.12, 2 Tim. 2.5). Respect whatever is praiseworthy (Phil. 4.8). God calls us to join Him in His work of restoration (Mic. 6.8, Isa. 1.17, Jer. 22.16, Hosea 6.6). *What happens if your students don't connect what they study to biblical principles?*
2. *How important is it for your students to be able to think through questions like the following?* What's God's purpose for ____? What's wrong? What's the balance between mercy and justice? What's success? *What happens if your students can't think through these questions?*
3. *How important is it for your students to not believe the following?* "Connecting what I study and what the Bible teaches is not important." "The Bible doesn't connect to what I study at school." *What happens if your students believe things like these?*

Take action: Analyze and explain the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading and by explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session the importance of helping students connect God's world and Word.

Here's an example of a 10th grader connecting Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* and biblical shalom:

Genesis 1 describes the perfect creation God had made in the beginning.... However, as man marred his image of God through sin, the relationships between God and man, God and creation, and man and creation were broken.... Romans 8.21 expresses the hope for this restoration.... This concept of biblical shalom is elucidated by Alan Paton's book.... Beginning with Stephen Kumalo, one finds the broken relationship between God and man and creation in the tribe, and through much adversity and sorrow, Kumalo attempts to build shalom by restoring the broken relationships.

Session 3: What does/doesn't connecting God's world and Word look like?

Connect with others

1. What is one way your students are growing?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one connection you want your students to make?

Focus on this session's goal

To identify and explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like.

Read

We want our students to develop a Christ-centered worldview. To help our students, we have them do a variety of things, including object lessons, devotions, and character development. We can also have them connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. To learn more, read "Reading 3: What's happening? What's not happening?"

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is comfortable/uncomfortable about helping your students develop a Christ-centered worldview?
3. How does each of the following help your students develop a Christ-centered worldview?
 - A. Object lessons
 - B. Devotions
 - C. Character development
 - D. Service projects
 - E. Connections between the part of God's world students study and God's Word
4. How would you explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like to...
 - A. A colleague who focuses solely on object lessons?
 - B. A student who thinks that devotions is the only way to connect to God's Word?
 - C. A parent who believes the only way to help students develop a biblical worldview is through character development?
 - D. A student who is mindlessly doing service projects?
5. What can you do to further identify and explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further identify and explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 3: What's happening? What's not happening?

Exciting things happen in Christian schools, things that help students develop a Christ-centered worldview.

Question: In the following 4 scenarios, what exciting things are happening *and* what's not happening?

1. Tanya, one of my students, shared the Gospel with a friend. Tanya shared that Jesus is the light of the world. I'm glad she made a connection between photons and God's Word, and used it!
2. It's great teaching in a Christian school. Here, I can start my first-period math class with devotions. Just today, Taro led devotions. He read Psalm I. Then we sang "I Love to Tell the Story" and prayed. Daily devotions help my students focus on living for God, which results in them making connections between the math project they're working on—making a recommendation of the best way to pay for a computer—and God's Word.
3. My language arts students are demonstrating Christian character in terms of collaborating—they're functioning like the Body of Christ. That's exciting, because it means they're connecting the stories we're studying, like *Miss Nelson is Missing*, and God's Word.
4. My social studies students are raising money to stop human trafficking. My students are really connecting what we're studying in class—the American Revolutionary War—and God's Word.

Answer: In the above 4 scenarios, exciting things are happening—students are using object lessons to share their faith, participating in daily devotions, working effectively with each other, and doing service projects. Great! These are good things that we want students to do.

And while good things are happening, please note what's not happening—students are not making connections between the part of God's world they study and God's Word:

1. Tanya, instead of connecting photons and God's creative power, shares an object lesson: Jesus is the light of the world.
2. Math students, instead of connecting payment plans and principles of biblical stewardship, are participating in the reading of Psalm I and the singing of "I Love to Tell the Story."
3. Language arts students, instead of connecting themes from *Miss Nelson is Missing* with biblical principles regarding authority and respect, are demonstrating Christian character by collaborating.
4. Social studies students, instead of connecting the American Revolutionary War and biblical principles regarding government and war, are doing service projects.

Bottom line: Help your students develop a Christ-centered worldview. Continue involving them in object lessons, devotions, character development, and service projects. Since these things don't necessarily involve students in connecting the part of God's world they study and God's Word, help your students make these connections (*see sidebar*).

Take action: Identify and explain what connecting God's world and Word looks like. You can do this by discussing this reading and by explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session what connecting God's world and Word looks like.

Here's how a 10th grader connected Camus's worldview as portrayed in "The Guest" and God's Word:

Albert Camus believed in existentialism, that life was meaningless and there was no afterlife. Still, he insisted that by acting and living as if there is meaning to life, we can create some for ourselves. He wants to enjoy life to the fullest, which is what Solomon said in the Bible. Yet, if we were randomly created and/or evolved, it makes no sense for us to want meaning and purpose. Camus refused to believe that Christ died for our sin and gave us meaning, or that heaven and hell were real.

Session 4: How does God's Word connect to the part of God's world your students study?

Connect with others

1. What is one thing you like about teaching at this school?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What are your students studying about God's world and how people are using it?

Focus on this session's goal

To document one or more biblical principles you want your students to connect to the part of God's world they are studying.

Read

We want students to develop a Christ-centered worldview. Teachers can help students do this during class by having them connect God's world and Word. To learn more about how God's Word connects to the part of God's world your students study, read "Reading 4: Have students connect relevant biblical principles to what they study."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is familiar/unfamiliar about the 5-step process described in the reading?
3. Let's use the 5-step process to identify how God's Word connects to the part of God's world your students study:
 - A. What is something your students study about God's world and how people are using it? Tell me about that.
 - B. Which one or more items from the following list naturally connect to the part of God's world your students study? God, people, morality, death, history, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, loving God/neighbor, caring for creation, making disciples, being part of the Church, respect/disrespect of authority, sanctity of life/murder, sexual purity/promiscuity, private property/theft, truth telling/bearing false witness, contentment/covetousness, servanthood/selfishness
 - C. What does God's Word say about these items that naturally connects to the part of God's world your students study?
 - D. How could you state what God's Word teaches in terms of one or more biblical principles?
 - E. What Bible verses support each biblical principle?
4. What can you do to document one or more biblical principles you want your students to connect to the part of God's world they study?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to document one or more biblical principles that connect to the part of God's world that your students study?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 4: Have students connect relevant biblical principles to what they study

We want our students to develop a Christ-centered worldview. We want our students to see all of life through the lens of Scripture. And the good news is that you can help your students develop a Christ-centered worldview during class. How? By having your students connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word.

You might be wondering, "How does God's Word connect to the part of God's world my students study?" Well, your science students' study of photons connects to God's creative power. Your math students' study of how to pay for a computer connects to what God's Word says about stewardship and debt. And your language arts students' study of *Miss Nelson is Missing* connects to biblical teaching on authority and respect. Your social studies students' study of war connects to what God's Word says about submitting to governmental authority and the sanctity of life.

Here's a 5-step process you can use to determine how God's Word connects to the part of God's world that your students study:

1. Think of something your students study about God's world.
2. Identify one or more items from the following list that naturally connect to what your students are studying. (For example, my science students' study of photons fits with creation.) Here's the list: God, people, morality, death, history, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, loving God/neighbor, caring for creation, making disciples, being part of the Church, respect/disrespect of authority, sanctity of life/murder, sexual purity/promiscuity, private property/theft, truth telling/bearing false witness, contentment/covetousness, servanthood/selfishness.
3. Ask yourself, "What does God's Word say about these items that naturally connects to what my students are studying?"
4. Ask yourself, "How could I state what God's Word teaches in terms of one or more biblical principles?"
5. And ask yourself, "What Bible verses support each biblical principle?"

What does using this 5-step process look like?

- Step 1: Imagine your students are studying racism.
- Step 2: Racism fits with several items from the list like creation and loving God/neighbor.
- Step 3: God's Word says we are His image bearers and that we should love our neighbors.
- Steps 4-5: You decide to use the following principle: Because people are created in God's image (Gen. 1.28), we should love others (Lev. 19.18, Mt. 22.39, Mark 12.31, Rom. 13.9), not murder them (Gen. 9.6, Exod. 20.13) or curse them (Jas. 3.9).

Why have students use biblical principles (supported by verses), instead of just verses? Because using principles helps students understand what God's Word teaches, not just what one verse teaches. Because using principles supported by verses decreases the likelihood that students will use Bible verses incorrectly. And because using principles supported by verses is more scholarly than using just verses.

Take action: Document one or more biblical principles you want your students to connect to the part of God's world they are studying. Ways to get started on this include discussing this reading and using the 5-step process outlined in this reading to identify biblical principles you want your students to connect to the part of God's world they study.

Here are biblical principles that teachers use:

Elementary school:

God cares about people from all nations (Mark 16.15, John 3.16, Gen. 12.13). God created an orderly world for us to live in (Col. 1.17, Ps. 147.4, Luke 12.7).

Middle school:

Creation is God's artwork (Gen. 1, John 1.3, Col. 1.16-17). God expects His people to obey Him (1 Sam. 15.22, Mic. 6.8, Rom. 2.13). We need to use our time wisely to reap rewards (1 Pet. 3.8-9).

High school:

All people have responsibilities to steward God's creation (Gen. 1.26). Blessings come from following God's plan for family (Eph. 5.22-6.4, Exod. 20.12).

Session 5: How can you get your students more engaged in connecting God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is one good thing that happened recently in your class(es)?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you do to get your students engaged in learning?

Focus on this session's goal

To get your students even more engaged in connecting God's world and Word by having your students learn new biblical principles and/or helping your students make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.

Read

If you want to help your students connect God's world and Word, don't bore them. Instead, engage them. Engage them by having them learn new biblical principles and by making new connections between the biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study. To learn more, read "Reading 5: To engage your students, have them learn new things."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What do you like/dislike about having your students learn new biblical principles? about having your students make new connections between the biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study?
3. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being "bored" and 5 being "really into it")...
 - A. How engaging do your students find connecting God's world and Word?
 - B. How engaging do you want your students to find connecting God's world and Word?
4. What can you do to get your students more engaged?
 - A. What new biblical principles could you help your students learn?
 - B. What new connections could you help your students make between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to get your students even more engaged in connecting God's world and Word by having your students learn new biblical principles and/or helping your students make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 5: To engage your students, have them learn new things

I don't like being bored. I don't like going over and over something I already know. I don't like it when I go to a workshop to learn something new, but instead I hear something I already know. And I don't like it when I'm asked to apply what I know in the same way—no new connections, no new learning, no added value. Boring.

I got into teaching because I like learning new things and making new connections. God's world is so wonderful, so diverse, with so many possibilities for learning, there's no reason learning has to be boring. How about you? How do you feel about being bored? about learning?

I don't think our students like being bored either. I don't think they like going over and over what they already know. I don't think they like it when they're not learning new things or making new connections. And students tell me they don't like applying what they know in the same way over and over.

When I think of times my students were really engaged in learning, I think of times when they were learning new things (like an existentialist view of suffering as presented in Archibald MacLiesh's *J.B.*). I think of times when they were making new connections (like how to respond as a Christian to an existentialist who is asking heartfelt questions about the nature suffering).

How about you? When you think of times when your students were really engaged, was it when they were learning new things? when they were making new connections?

If you want to help your students connect God's world and Word, don't bore them. For example, don't have your foreign language students learn the same biblical principle ("Language is a gift from God") year after year. And don't have your foreign language students connect the same biblical principle ("Language is a gift from God") in the same way ("Explain why learning grammar is important") year after year. Don't teach your students that connecting God's world and Word is boring. The stakes are too high.

What can you do to engage your students? Have them learn new biblical principles:

- If your social studies students have already learned "We should love our neighbors" (Lev. 19.18, Matt. 22.39, Gal. 5.14), have them learn "God calls us to join Him in His work of restoration" (Mic. 6.8, Isa. 1.17, Jer. 22.16, Hos. 6.6).
- If your English students have already learned "People are created in God's image" (Gen. 1.27, 9.6; Jas. 3.9), have them learn "Because people are made in the image of God (Gen. 1.27, 9.6; Jas. 3.9), we are creative (Gen. 2.19, 4.21-22; Exod. 35.30-36.1), communicative (Gen. 2.20-24, Exod. 4.10-12, Jer. 1.4-9) truth-seekers."

You can also engage your students by having them make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study. Have your social studies students connect "We should love our neighbors" (Lev. 19.18, Matt. 22.39, Gal. 5.14) to the new content they are learning—Korean culture, the US Civil War, or discrimination. Have your English students connect "People are created in God's image" (Gen. 1.27, 9.6; Jas. 3.9) to the novel they are reading—like *Red Scarf Girl* or *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Bottom line: Engage your students. Have them learn new biblical principles. Have them make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.

Take action: Get your students even more engaged in connecting God's world and Word by having them learn new things. You can do this by discussing this reading, identifying 2 new biblical principles your students can learn, and by identifying 2 new connections you want your students to make between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.

Session 6: How can you help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. In terms of student learning, what is one thing you're excited about?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you do to help your students make connections?

Focus on this session's goal

To prepare to teach a lesson designed to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

When you want your students to learn something, you teach them a lesson on it. So, if you want your students to connect God's world and Word, teach a lesson in which your students connect God's world and Word. As you prepare your lesson, ask yourself the following questions: What part of God's world are my students studying? What part of God's Word connects to what they are studying? What connections do I want them to make between God's world and Word? What type of lesson will engage my students in making connections? To learn more, read "Reading 6: Teach a lesson that helps your students make connections."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is easy/challenging about preparing a lesson designed to help your students connect God's world and Word?
3. In one of your classes, what are your students studying about God's world?
4. What biblical principles connect to what your students are studying about God's world? Use questions A-D as necessary:
 - A. Which one or more items from the following list naturally connect to the part of God's world your students study? God, people, morality, death, history, creation, fall, redemption, restoration, loving God/neighbor, caring for creation, making disciples, being part of the Church, respect/disrespect of authority, sanctity of life/murder, sexual purity/promiscuity, private property/theft, truth telling/bearing false witness, contentment/covetousness, servanthood/selfishness
 - B. What does God's Word say about these items that naturally connects to the part of God's world your students are studying?
 - C. How could you state what God's Word teaches in terms of one or more biblical principles?
 - D. What Bible verses support each biblical principle?
5. What connections do you want your students to make between God's world and Word?
6. What instructional strategies could you use to engage your students in connecting God's world and Word? (For example, asking questions, brainstorming, case studies, compare/contrast, cooperative learning, discussion, drawing pictures, graphic organizers, jigsaw, role play, journaling, simulation, storytelling, and testing hypotheses.)
7. What could you do for your lesson introduction, body, and conclusion?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to prepare for and teach a lesson designed to help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 6: Teach a lesson that helps your students make connections

Interview with Anda, Social Studies 6 teacher, on a lesson she taught

What part of God's world were your students studying?

Anda: They were studying ancient Egypt, including things like mummies, pyramids, religion, and hieroglyphics. They flew through thousands of years of geography, history, and culture in a month, while focusing on essential questions—What do you have in common with the ancient Egyptians? How are you different? How could a child of God have responded to the Egyptians?

What biblical principles did you want them to connect to Egyptian culture?

Anda: Principles like God is one and above all other gods (Deut. 28:58, Josh. 1:8, 2 Chron. 17:9, John 20:31), eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus (John 11:25, Heb. 9:27-28), and people are creative because they are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27, Ps. 8:5-8).

What connections did you want your students to make?

Anda: I wanted them to connect things like:

1. Egyptians worshipped many gods / God is one, above all other gods.
2. Egyptians mummified bodies to prepare them for the afterlife / Eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus.
3. Egyptians built and created interesting things and ideas / People are creative because we are made in the image of God.

How did you help your students connect Egyptian culture and biblical principles?

Anda: I did a lesson in which I focused students on making connections. For my lesson introduction, I used guided discussion. I asked students questions—How does what people believe about God affect the things they do and the way they live? What if they believed in lots of gods? What if those gods were cruel? What if there was only one God who was both loving and powerful?

I guided the discussion until my students reached the conclusions that many of the accomplishments of the Egyptians were a result of what they believed about life, death, and the how gods they believed in controlled these things.

For the body of my lesson, students completed a jigsaw. First, I had them independently read and highlight an article about one of 4 aspects of ancient Egyptian culture (hieroglyphics, pyramids, mummies, or religion). Then as groups, they discussed their main ideas and listed them on one sheet of paper. And as groups, they read biblical principles/passages, using what they learned to discuss and write answers to one or more essential questions. Finally, they presented their main ideas to the class.

To wrap up the lesson, my students journaled on the following 3 questions: How did the Egyptians' beliefs affect the way they lived? How am I similar to and different from the ancient Egyptians? How does what I believe affect the way I live?

What were the results?

Anda: In a presentation at the end of the unit on ancient Egypt, one student said, "The Egyptians believed there were lots of things you had to do to get eternal life. That's why they made mummies. That's not what Christians believe; we know that it's only through Jesus!"

Take action: Help your students connect God's world and World by preparing for and teaching a lesson. You can prepare for your lesson by discussing this reading, by writing out your lesson plan, and by inviting one colleague to give you feedback on your plan before you teach it.



Anda, Social Studies 6

Just because kids know the Bible stories and understand the social studies content doesn't mean they automatically make connections between the two.

Session 7: How committed are you to helping your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is something you've seen God doing in your class recently?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one thing you're committed to in education?

Focus on this session's goal

To increase your commitment to helping your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

People who are committed do things. They take action. Teachers who are committed to helping their students connect God's world and Word do things—they ask God for help, teach lessons designed to help their students make connections, and provide time in class for their students to reflect. They take action to live out this commitment. To learn more, read "Reading 7: Increase your commitment."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What excites/concerns you about being committed to helping your students connect God's world and Word?
3. What do you like/dislike about the 6-step process?
4. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high)...
- A. How committed are you to targeting students connecting God's world and Word?
- B. How committed do you want to be?
5. What goals could you pursue in order to help your students connect God's world and Word?
6. Which one of these goals do you want to pursue?
7. What are some action steps you could take to achieve your goal?
8. Who can provide the support, encouragement, and accountability you need to pursue your goal?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take in order to increase your commitment to helping your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)



I would enjoy learning about how you are helping your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at learnmore@closethegapnow.org.

—Michael B. Essenburg

Reading 7: Increase your commitment

It's crucial. In Christian education, it's crucial to target students connecting God's world and Word. Why? Because the more teachers target connecting God's world and Word, the more students connect God's world and Word. Here's what 2 teachers have to say:

- I've shifted my target from students learning math to students applying a biblical perspective to the math they have learned. It took quite a bit of work, but it was worth it. Now, my students complete geometry projects in which they apply a biblical perspective. Targeting biblical perspective works! —*high school math teacher*
- When I pay attention to a goal, I make more progress. I've been paying more attention to helping my students apply a biblical perspective to literature, and they're getting better at it. It's exciting when students write things like, "This world is a corrupt, evil place, and the book [*Cry, the Beloved Country*] recognizes that. The fact that people went out and did something to help change the place where they were has inspired me. We are all equal, and looking down on people isn't what God wants us to do. We need to love our neighbors as ourselves." —*high school English teacher*

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how committed are you to targeting students connecting God's world and Word?
2. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), how committed do you want to be?

So, how can you maintain and increase your level of commitment? By doing something. By taking action to help your students. Here's a 6-step process you can use to take action:

1. Select a goal that will help you help your students connect God's world and Word. Write down your goal.
2. Brainstorm the action steps you can take to achieve your goal. Make your action steps specific and bite size. Write down your action steps.
3. Review your action steps and commit to completing one action step within the next 5 work days. Ask a colleague to give you the support, encouragement, and accountability you need to complete your action step.
4. Take action. Complete the action step.
5. Talk with your colleague about your progress on your goal.
6. Repeat steps 3-5 until you have completed all the action steps you wrote down.

Here are some sample goals that might help you get started:

- Regularly ask God to help your students understand and connect God's world and Word.
- Regularly teach lessons that help your students connect God's world and Word.
- Help your students learn new biblical principles and/or help them make new connections between biblical principles they already know and the part of God's world they study.
- Provide time in class for your students to reflect on how God's world and Word are connected.
- Consistently focus on your students connecting God's world and Word (not just on learning about God's world).

Take action: Increase your commitment to helping your students connect God's world and Word. Ways to get started include discussing this reading and using the 6-step process.