Worldview Detective

A Socratic Method for Investigating Great Books

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Introduction

How to Use This Book

- This book is not intended to be used separately from the DVD presentation.
- Neither is it a student curriculum or a workbook.
- Instead, it is a **resource manual** for the teacher, designed to accompany the material presented in the DVD course.

In order to get the most out of *Worldview Detective*, complete the following steps:

1. **Read** both stories first: Jack London's "To Build a Fire" and Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation." The text of the first story is included in this syllabus; you'll need to check the other out of a library. If you are familiar with the *Teaching the Classics* approach, do a structural analysis of these stories, looking for conflict, climax and major themes. Try to identify the author's point or message by asking questions from the Socratic List. (for more information about *Teaching the Classics*, visit our website at www.centerforlit.com).

2. **Watch** the DVD presentation straight through, taking notes in Sections 1 through 4 of this syllabus in the spaces provided. Once it includes your notes and comments, this syllabus will serve as your teacher manual for future discussions.

3. **Refer** to your notes and the other resources in the syllabus again and again as you lead worldview discussions with your own students.

PART 1

Your Assignment:
Reading with Integrity

This section is designed for use with Part 1 of the *Worldview Detective* DVD presentation. The following questions form the basis of that discussion, and the answers lay out the fundamental principles of the *Worldview Detective* approach. Use the space provided after each question to take notes from the presentation and to jot down your own reactions, comments and ideas.

What is a *worldview*?

What is a *Biblical* or *Christian* worldview?

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PART 2

Your Equipment:
The Socratic List

1) What does the story say about God?

a. Does the world of the story include a God or higher power that governs events in some way? Is the higher power assumed to exist or is it mentioned explicitly?

b. Who is God? Jehovah? Allah? Zeus? Fate? Chance? Nature?

c. What is God like? Is he (or it) loving, judgmental, terrible, inscrutable, capricious, good, evil, --?

d. What actions are ascribed to God in the story, either implicitly or explicitly?

e. How does God relate to man? Is the relationship adversarial in some way? If so, who opposes whom?

f. Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as THE AUTHOR saw it?

g. Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as YOU see it?

2) What does the story say about human nature?

a. What is a human being?

b. Are human beings different from animals? In what ways?

c. Are human beings created by some higher power, or is man his own god?

d. Do human beings have souls? Eternal ones?

e. Do human beings exist for a purpose? What is it?

f. What adjectives might be used to describe human nature as it is presented in the story? Is it brave, generous, heroic, creative and benevolent? Is it frail, selfish, dull or evil?

g. Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as THE AUTHOR saw it?

h. Do the story's answers to these questions tell the truth as YOU see it?

3) What does the story say about the natural world?

a. What rules govern the natural world in the story?

PART 3

Training Exercise:
"To Build a Fire" by Jack London

1.

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-travelled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky-line and dip immediately from view.

2.

The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white, rolling in gentle undulations where the ice-jams of the freeze-up had formed. North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail—the main trail—that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

3.

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a chechaquo, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero

Jack London's "To Build a Fire": Worldview Analysis

The questions and answers below present a discussion like the one found on the DVD recording, which is based on questions from the Socratic List. These are provided here along with their answers so that you can give your full attention to the oral discussion and begin to assimilate our discussion technique. In the next exercise, you'll be required to take your own notes!

Questions in this section are drawn from the Socratic List, which is found in Part 2 above. Answers are given in italics, and represent possible responses to the Socratic questions. You may, of course, answer the questions differently – these are provided as a guide to discussion only.

What does the story say about God?

Does the world of the story include a God or higher power that governs events in some way? Is the higher power assumed to exist or is it mentioned explicitly?

If there is a higher power in this story, it is the natural world. We might say that the natural world has endowed the dog and the man with instinct, and has endowed the man with intelligence as well.

Who is God? Jehovah? Allah? Zeus? Fate? Chance? Nature?

Nature

What is God like? Is he (or it) loving, judgmental, terrible, inscrutable, capricious, good or evil?

Nature is an impersonal force which operates by physical laws and chance.

What actions are ascribed to God in the story, either implicitly or explicitly?

Nature kills the man, but selects the dog for survival.

How does God relate to man? Is the relationship adversarial in some way? If so, who opposes whom?

Nature relates to man as an impersonal force, acting upon him relentlessly, exposing his weaknesses and eventually killing him.

What does the story say about human nature?

What is a human being?

A certain kind of animal

Are human beings different from animals? In what ways?

They are not really different from animals, except they have intelligence instead of just instinct, which may be seen as a hindrance rather than an asset. They are frail and unsuited to life in the natural world.

Are human beings created by some higher power, or is man his own god?

There is no mention of God in this story and no reference to a higher power or to creation.

Do human beings have souls? Eternal ones?

There is no mention of souls or eternity in this story.

Do human beings exist for a purpose? What is it?

We can't detect a purpose for human existence in this story.

What adjectives might be used to describe human nature as it is presented in the story? Is it brave, generous, heroic, creative and benevolent? Is it frail, selfish, dull or evil?

Human nature is frail, dull and selfish, concerned only with survival.

What does the story say about the natural world?

What rules govern the natural world in the story?

The law of cause and effect governs the natural world, as demonstrated by the events that surround the man's death. Also, the law of instinct, which might be called the law of self-preservation, governs the relationship between the man and the dog. Finally, the law of chance has a significant role to play, as demonstrated by the circumstances that lead the man to build his fire beneath the snowy bough.

Is the natural world a source of good or evil in the story? What good things does it produce? What evil things?

The natural world is evil because it causes the death of the protagonist. On the other hand, the natural world is good because it provides the dog with instinct, the means of self-preservation.

What does the story say about human society and human relationships?

This story is not about human relationships. These were not the primary concern of the author, possibly because he did not see man as any different than an animal. The man is the only human being in the story.

What is the highest good in the story?

How does the story measure or define success? Happiness? Value? Goodness?

Survival is the best measure of success. Victory in the struggle for survival is the best gauge of happiness or value.

What things does the story label good?

Food, clothing, shelter and warmth.

How does the story measure or define a good life?

A life that is prolonged, even at the expense of someone else's.

APPENDIX A

Major Periods in English Language Literature

Worldview analysis of a work of literature begins with an understanding of the work's context. This invariably requires some knowledge of the period in which the work was written, and what ideas or movements influenced its composition. This appendix provides an overview of the history of English language literature.

Major Periods in English Language Literature

In the broadest terms, English language literature has undergone six major periods or movements since ancient times. They are usually described as follows (with very rough dates in parentheses):

- **Medieval** (500 – 1500 A.D.), beginning with the fall of Rome and continuing until the Renaissance;
- **Renaissance** (1500 – 1660), ending with the Restoration of Charles II;
- **Neo-classical** (1660 – 1800), beginning with the Restoration and continuing through the end of the revolutionary period, when it was known as the "Age of Enlightenment";
- **Romantic** (1800 – 1865), beginning in the last decades of the 18th century and continuing through the middle of the 19th;
- **Realist** (1840 – 1914), beginning in England with the accession of Queen Victoria and in America after the Civil War, and continuing up to WWI; and
- **Modern** (1900 – 1945), running from the turn of the twentieth century to the end of WWII.

Each of these labels reflects a system of broad assumptions about the world that was more or less generally accepted by thinkers of the period. Familiarity with these assumptions can help you place the books you read in the proper historical and philosophical context – a key first step in worldview analysis. If you know what characteristics generally apply to works of Realism, for example, you'll have a clue about Mark Twain's attitude toward his subject even before you read *Huckleberry Finn*.

Two Important Cautions

Thinking in terms of literary periods is a powerful way to understand an author's world view. However, it is not as simple as it sounds at first. Two main cautions are necessary:

Sub-periods

Within each literary period, there are variations that allow for the identification of distinct movements. *Elizabethan*, for example, is a special category of late *Renaissance* literature that includes William Shakespeare but excludes Thomas More, while the label *Victorian* corresponds to a particular kind of 19th century English *Realism* that includes Charles Dickens but not Mark Twain. It is helpful to remember that categorizing something is itself a work of interpretation, and there are as many ways to do it as there are interpreters. This guide will stick to the broadest and most generally agreed upon labels.

Overlap

New literary periods don't begin and end all at once, of course. Assumptions and conventions change gradually and unevenly, depending upon time, place and personality. The governing ideas of one period often linger long into the next, informing and shaping its development. This means that it is sometimes difficult to assign definitive dates to a particular period. For example, we can date the beginning of the Victorian period very specifically: 1837, when Victoria rose to the throne of England. It is more difficult to say exactly when Realism became the dominant mode of English literature.

Also, the fact that an author lived in a particular period doesn't necessarily mean his work bows to the conventions of that period. Literary history is full of examples of authors whose work foreshadowed future developments, or hearkened back to days gone by. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, for example, though written in the Victorian period, has much in common with works of the Romantic period which came before. By the same token, the works of Jane Austen seem to foreshadow the Victorian age, even though they were written during the height of Romanticism.

In the end, it is best to use your understanding of literary periods as a collection of "hints" about the world view assumptions of great authors. It can be a great way quickly to explain the differences between Jack London and Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, and pave the way for deeper study of their individual careers.

Sources

Reference texts such as the Norton Anthologies are excellent sources for information on literary periods and worldviews. In addition, they contain sizable excerpts from important works in each period. In many cases, texts are included in their entirety. In our view these volumes are worth owning as they provide an invaluable survey of Western literature.

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 5th ed. (New York: Norton, 1986)

The Norton Anthology of American Literature, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1985)

How To Use This Appendix:

This appendix is designed to prepare you for world view analysis by providing a summary of assumptions and themes common to literary works from each of the periods mentioned above. In addition, we have created a list of notable authors from each period and some of their most important works. Please note that the lists are not intended to be exhaustive. Authors and works have been included in order to illustrate and provide examples of the worldviews in question. For this reason, too, we have included some works of poetry and philosophy as well as fiction.

Finally, we have provided space for you to add to this list as you discover other titles that help you present worldview issues in your own classroom.

As with all lists, it is necessary to understand the purpose of this appendix before you dive in and begin assigning books. Some booklists are created for the purpose of saying, "Here's a list of books that are good for you. You can feel perfectly safe assigning any of these books to your student, regardless of his age or experience."

This is **not** that kind of list.

The titles on this list have been chosen because they represent (to one degree or another) major worldview trends in Western thought. They are included because they will provide your students with the opportunity to engage with worldviews other than their own. You may find the content of some of these titles disturbing or offensive – in many cases, their first readers felt the same way.

This is especially true of the modernist period, which arose because authors felt disconnected from traditional morality and traditional world views. As a result, you will find little support for traditional morality in modernist literature! Do not expect to find it – do not be surprised if you find the opposite instead. If you are looking to Ernest Hemingway to encourage and support your students in a Christian way of thinking, you are looking in the wrong place.

If, however, your student is ready to try his hand at interpretation of the world's most influential literature and to practice taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, the books in this appendix are just what you need!

I. Medieval Literature (500-1500)

Anglo-Saxon (500-1066)

The term "Anglo-Saxon" applies to literature produced between the invasion of Celtic England by Germanic tribes in the fifth century and the conquest of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror. This literature is heavily based on the tradition of oral storytelling, and includes epic poems such as *Beowulf*. Thematically, Anglo-Saxon literature often addressed the *heroic ideal*, which was a picture of kingly behavior that reflected the basic political and social relationship of Anglo-Saxon society: the bond between a king and his warriors. The heroic ideal involved responsibility, leadership, loyalty, generosity and, above all, skill in battle. Anglo-Saxon literature existed in part to praise the heroic virtues of its kings and so secure their eternal fame.

Anglo-Saxon England was Christianized in the 7th century, and from that date its literature became overwhelmingly Christian in its subject matter. Interestingly enough, however, it still retained its concern for the heroic ideal, and the result was a mingling of Christian and pagan elements. Biblical figures like Moses, Jesus and even God the Father often appeared as Beowulf-like heroes, performing mighty deeds.

Authors: Anglo-Saxon Literature

Anonymous

The Dream of the Rood (seventh century)
Beowulf (eighth century)
The Battle of Maldon (tenth century)

Caedmon

Hymn (seventh century)

Middle English (1066 -1500)

The Norman conquest of England in 1066 marks a significant change in the development of English literature. Where Anglo-Saxon literature had been written by and for the aristocracy (that is, kings and their households), Middle English literature was popular literature, written by and for people of the lower classes.

This change had a significant effect on the subject matter of Middle English literature. Its heroes, for example, were not the idealized kings of the Anglo-Saxon period; instead, they were real human protagonists who not only fought but also laughed, cried, played games, and above all, fell in and out of love. The situations of ordinary life played a much larger part in Middle English literature than they had before 1066.

Despite its new directions, Middle English literature continued to reflect the centrality of Christianity in the medieval world. Virtually all works, whether sacred or secular, dealt with issues such as personal salvation and the institutional church. Even the courtly love tales which were popular throughout the medieval

period were told from within the framework of Christian doctrines such as sin, self-sacrifice and piety.

Authors: Middle English Literature

Anonymous
Piers Plowman (c. 1372-1389)
Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (c. 1375-1400)
Everyman (after 1485)

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400)
The Canterbury Tales (c. 1386-1400)

Margery Kempe (1373-1438)
The Book of Margery Kempe (date unknown)

Sir Thomas Malory (c. 1405-1471)
Morte Darthur (1485)

Other Works of Medieval Literature:

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Appendix C

A Summary of Some Prevalent Worldviews

Every worldview has at its foundation two important questions, asked by all thinking men since the dawn of history: *Who is God*? and *What is Man*? Since good literature deals with humanity's universal questions, you can expect to find some version of these questions at the heart of any author's meditations. A man's assumptions about himself and his God influence everything he thinks, regardless of the subject. Of course, there are multiple ways to answer the questions.

Answers to the question: Who is God?

The two simplest answers to the question *Who is God* ? are found in the responses of Theism and Atheism. Theists acknowledge the existence of God, although their understanding of Who He is varies. Atheists deny the existence of any supernatural being. Some refuse to answer the question based on what they believe is insufficient information. This plea of uncertainty is referred to as agnosticism. In order to simplify our discussion of Worldview, we'll begin by categorizing the various major worldviews as either theistic or atheistic:

Theistic

Christianity
Deism
Judaism
Islam
Cosmic Humanism

Atheistic

Marxist-Leninism
Secular Humanism
Modernism
Postmodernism
Environmentalism

Notice that the category " Theism" merely acknowledges the existence of God. It doesn't indicate the kind of god in question. In order to further understand worldviews, it is necessary to ask what kind of supernatural being the worldview acknowledges. For example:

Is the supernatural being singular (monotheism) or plural (polytheism)?

Monotheistic Worldviews

Christianity
Deism
Judaism
Islam

Polytheistic Worldviews

Cosmic Humanism

Is the god personal or impersonal in nature?

Worldviews that acknowledge a personal god, who both exhibits a distinct personality and interacts individually with man, include:

Christianity
Judaism
Islam

Is the god separate from man and nature or a part of man and nature?

In addition, it is necessary to distinguish whether the god is distinct from man and creation or a part of man and creation.

God is distinct from man and creation

Deism
Christianity
Judaism
Islam

God is one with man and creation

Cosmic Humanism
Pantheism

It is easy to see that the more questions one asks, the clearer the divisions between worldviews become.

What of the second foundational question for worldview study, *What is Man?* An individual may answer this question in a variety of ways. He might say man is a collection of electrically animated cells and matter. He might say man is a creature made in the image of God. He may say he is the most highly evolved animal in nature. He

may say he is perfectible. He may say he is fatally flawed by sin. Even this brief list of possible answers reveals the significance of the question. If man is merely cells and matter, he is no more than a part of creation itself, and as such, warrants no special privilege compared to other organisms. If he is the most evolved, then he has gained the right through intellect and luck to leverage his position in nature. If he is mostly good and finally perfectible, then he is not to be feared. If he is fatally flawed by sin, he is to be regarded with suspicion.

Answers to these questions produce consequences in the practical life of the thinker, as well as in the lives of those with whom he interacts. This is why worldview thinking is so important.

A brief definition of the dominant worldviews may aid the student of Worldview Analysis:

Theistic Worldviews

Christianity – Monotheistic in nature, Christianity testifies to a triune God who manifested Himself personally to man in the historic, loving person of Jesus Christ, the image of God incarnate. Christian doctrine teaches that man was made in the image of God. Christians therefore regard man as the pinnacle of God's creation, thought hey acknowledge that he is fatally flawed by sin. This doctrine explains why men demonstrate both good and evil behaviors. Christians believe that the incarnate God, Jesus, sought man out and died to pay the penalty for man's sin, rising again from the dead because He was stronger than death. He promises relationship with God for those who put their faith in Him. Christians relate to their God on the basis of His work for them.

Deism – Deism, too, is monotheistic in nature. However, Deists deny the personal nature of God. Although they consider God the source of all things, they see him as a watchmaker who created the watch that is the world, wound it up and walked away. Although this God is powerful and creative, He is disinterested in the world He made and in man.

Judaism – Also monotheistic in nature, Judaism appeals to the commands of the Torah: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is One God." Jews acknowledge the justice and mercy of this creator God who established personal relationship with the nation of Israel, and they continue to await the Messiah, the Deliverer He promised through the words of His prophets. They believe this Messiah will rescue them from their sin and apostasy. The source of their doctrine and faith is the Old Testament, which they regard as holy scripture. Jews relate to their god on the basis of their works and His mercy.

Islam – Islam, too, is monotheistic in nature. Followers of Islam are called Muslims, and they call their god Allah. Muslim believers regard the first five books of the Old Testament as holy writ, together with the writings of Mohammed, the first prophet of Islam. However, they maintain that their holy book, the Quran, alone is uncorrupted. Muslims appeal to the Quran, together with the Hadith, the book of Muslim teachings,

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