

8TH GRADE: FREEDOM WRITERS

Recently, 8th grade English students worked on in-class essays, analyzing the intersection of freedom and Christian values using insights from studied memoirs. The prompt required students to examine how personal narratives either reflect or challenge biblical principles on freedom, citing specific examples from the memoirs. This exercise enhanced their literary analysis skills and deepened their understanding of the relationship between individual freedom and Christian values. Students answered the following prompts:

How have those you know struggled for freedom?

How can your experience of freedom help influence others?

How would you respond if you suddenly lost your freedom?

To comprehend freedom in the biblical sense, students delved into the principles and values conveyed in the Bible regarding individual and collective liberty. The Bible often addresses concepts of freedom in relation to moral choices, righteousness, and liberation from sin. By drawing connections between biblical narratives and the studied memoirs, such as "The Diary of Anne Frank," "The Red Scarf Girl," and "Through My Eyes," students gained valuable insights into the biblical perspective on freedom.

The Diary of Anne Frank:

Anne Frank's diary, set against the backdrop of the Holocaust, provided a poignant exploration of the struggle for freedom amidst persecution. Through Anne's experiences, students gleaned insights into the biblical themes of liberation and justice, emphasizing the importance of standing against oppression and injustice. For example, Anne's confinement in the secret annex is not an example of true freedom. Instead, true freedom is exemplified when Anne expresses her thoughts and dreams in her diary, stating, "I want to be useful or bring enjoyment to all people, even those I've never met."

The Red Scarf Girl:

Reflecting the experiences of a young girl during China's Cultural Revolution, this memoir resonated with Christian values such as perseverance and faith. Students drew parallels between the characters' quests for freedom amidst political turmoil and the enduring faith depicted in Christian narratives. For instance, Ji-li's relentless pursuit of academic excellence despite facing opposition from the authorities exemplifies a form of good freedom. She states, "I will not allow their oppression to hinder my dreams and aspirations."

Through My Eyes:

This memoir offered a lens into the Civil Rights Movement through the eyes of Ruby Bridges. Students highlighted the value of justice and equality, connecting the struggles for racial equality depicted in the memoir with Christian teachings on treating others with fairness and dignity. Ruby's courageous act of attending an all-white school amidst hostility and threats showcases a powerful example of good freedom. She asserts, "I may be young, but I believe in the principles of equality and justice for all."

Values Students Can Gain:

- **Empathy:** Learning about freedom through these memoirs and the Bible fosters empathy by helping students understand the diverse struggles individuals have faced throughout history.
- **Courage:** The studied narratives exemplify courage in the pursuit of freedom, mirroring biblical stories that emphasize bravery in the face of adversity.
- **Responsibility:** Students may grasp the biblical concept of responsible freedom, understanding that freedom comes with ethical responsibilities towards oneself and others.

By integrating these memoirs with biblical principles, students not only enhance their literary analysis skills but also gain a deeper appreciation for the values of freedom, empathy, courage, and responsibility as seen through the lens of both personal narratives and biblical teachings.

Student Insights:

- **Colin Kruse:** Colin eloquently articulated the universal theme of freedom found in the studied memoirs, underscoring the writers' unwavering faith in God amidst adversity. His reflection emphasized the foundational role of faith in discerning true freedom, echoing the biblical notion that knowing God leads to genuine liberation. Colin also discerned between the wrong kind of freedom, such as the political freedom sought in "The Red Scarf Girl," where individuals sought to conform to oppressive political ideologies, sacrificing personal integrity. Conversely, he highlighted a good example of freedom found in "Through My Eyes," where Ruby Bridges' courageous pursuit of education amidst racial hostility exemplified true freedom, rooted in faith and justice.

-**Emma Nayeri:** Emma astutely defined freedom in God's eyes as liberation from the bondage of sin, drawing from Romans 8:2. Her interpretation underscored the Christian value of equality, emphasizing that all individuals are God's children, deserving equal treatment regardless of ethnicity. Emma drew upon examples from "The Red Scarf Girl" to illustrate the wrong treatment of ethnicity as a bad example of freedom. She highlighted instances where individuals were discriminated against based on their ethnic background, showcasing the detrimental effects of prejudice and injustice on personal freedom and dignity. Emma's analysis illuminated the importance of upholding Christian values of equality and justice in promoting true freedom for all individuals.

Freedom is the ability to act speak or think as one wants without hindrance nor restraint. To refine the definition to align with the character of God, we can emphasize the notion of aligning one's desires, actions, and thoughts with God's will and principles. Here's a refined version: "The ability to act, speak, or think in accordance with God's will and principles without hindrance or restraint, guided by righteousness, love, and wisdom."

Bloom's Taxonomy Questions:

1. **Remembering:** Can you recall specific examples from the memoirs that illustrate the struggle for freedom?
2. **Understanding:** How did Colin connect the themes of freedom in the memoirs to the writers' faith in God?
3. **Applying:** How might Colin's understanding of freedom influence his actions in real-life situations?
4. **Analyzing:** How did Colin analyze the relationship between the struggles for freedom in the memoirs and the writers' trust in God?
5. **Evaluating:** Based on Emma's interpretation of freedom in Romans 8:2, how would you assess the alignment between biblical principles and the struggles for equality presented in the memoirs?
6. **Creating:** Can you devise a plan to integrate Emma's understanding of freedom from sin into practical strategies for promoting equality and dignity among all people?