

## **Ideas for Classroom Projects, Papers, and Assignments**

**Bible and Arts Project**

**Current Issue Paper**

**Interdisciplinary Papers**

**Peer Interview Project**

**Religious Site Visit**

## Bible and Arts Project

Artists and musicians across the ages have found inspiration in the stories and ideas contained in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. For this assignment, students will explore the links between the Bible and the arts. The basic requirement is to identify a particular artist or work of art (song, film, play, painting, sculpture, etc.) that employs material from the Hebrew Bible and discuss how the artist is interpreting the biblical text. Possible sources of material include museum exhibits, art galleries, live or recorded performances, books, cinemas, DVDs, and the Internet.

In the case of films or plays, a single work will usually contain sufficient material for a paper. For more concrete works like songs or paintings, multiple examples might be needed to supply enough material. (In case of uncertainty, check with the instructor.) Both secular and religious songs (e. g., hymns or contemporary Christian music) are acceptable as long as they contain explicit references to the Hebrew Bible (not just to Christianity or faith in general).

A good paper will first identify the text(s) to which the artist is referring, then conduct a close comparison of the work of art with the text of Scripture. (Feel free to ask if you cannot locate the passage.) Special attention should be given to identifying where the artist is simply following the language of the biblical text and where he or she seems to be actively deviating from the text (adding or deleting material, adopting a particular point of view, etc.). This alone, however, is not sufficient for a good paper—the paper should also include observations about possible reasons for the differences (i. e., what the artist seems to be trying to communicate by his or her manner of handling Scripture). The primary goal of the paper is to describe how the artist has interpreted the text of the Hebrew Bible.

Papers should reflect your own insights, not material gleaned from Web sites or other sources. (Be careful to document any sources that you use!) Three pages should be sufficient for a good analysis. Papers that are based on works other than films or plays should include printouts of the artwork used in the paper.

## Current Issue Paper

Jews and Christians invariably turn to the Bible for guidance about what constitutes proper and improper behavior for individuals and societies. More often than not this leads to disagreement and conflict, as people read biblical texts differently and/or base their views on different verses of Scripture.

The purpose of this assignment is to investigate how religious people use the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament to support their views on a contemporary moral or ethical issue. Students should choose a controversial issue like abortion, capital punishment, homosexuality, or war, and investigate how Jews and/or Christians use the Bible to argue on both sides of the issue. Papers that look at only one side of an issue are not acceptable. Papers should identify specific biblical texts that are cited by each side and discuss how each side is interpreting the verses that they cite. Special attention should be given to the question of whether the opposing parties are appealing to different texts or interpreting the same verses in different ways. Where possible, papers should comment on what each side thinks about the other side's handling of the Bible.

Material for these papers can be found in a variety of sources, including newspapers, books, magazines, and the Internet. All papers must include a full bibliography that lists at least five different sources. Three to four pages is usually sufficient for a good paper.

## Interdisciplinary Papers

While the Hebrew Bible originated in a time and culture very different from our own, it has been used throughout the ages to guide the thoughts and actions of people in virtually every area of life. For this assignment, you will choose an issue or problem from your own academic field of study and investigate how the Hebrew Bible has been or might be applied to that issue. You may write on any topic that seems interesting to you, but the topic should be cleared with the instructor in advance in order to ensure that the topic is both relevant and manageable. All papers must include references to specific texts of Scripture; broad, sweeping comments are not acceptable. A good paper will require three to five pages of typed text.

The following list of topics is not meant to be exhaustive, but only to stimulate thought. Students should feel free to suggest other topics that might fulfill the goals set forth above.

<b>Major</b>	<b>Possible Topics</b>
Business	Biblical views of money and wealth; scriptural guidance for business ethics
Education	Biblical teachings on training/educating children
Sciences	Creation/evolution debates; origins of the universe; what it means to be human
Journalism	Bias vs. objectivity in reporting events
Social sciences	Gender roles in the Hebrew Bible; wealth and poverty
Arts	Creative arts in the ancient world
English	Poetry or other literary features in the Hebrew Bible
History	Historical analysis of a particular story or passage
Philosophy	Problem of evil in the Hebrew Bible; paths to knowledge
Political science	Political structures of ancient Israel; attitudes toward politics/government in the Hebrew Bible

## Peer Interview Project

Choose five friends or relatives and ask them the questions below regarding their experiences and attitudes regarding Scriptures. (Note: For most people “Scriptures” will mean “the Bible,” but not for people raised in a non-Christian religion.) If you find that someone is unwilling to give you enough information to answer the questions, you should either ask more questions to elicit a fuller response or find someone who is more cooperative. Once you have talked with everyone, prepare a two to four page summary of their responses (i. e., not just a list of their answers), allowing a paragraph for each person. You need not use people’s full names in the report, but you should at least include their first names in order to distinguish them from one another. If you wish, you may include yourself as one of the five people whose views you report in your paper.

1. How often did you go to religious services when you were growing up? What kind? What did you think about them as a child?
2. Did you have any kind of formal religious education as a child (confirmation classes, Sunday School, parochial school, etc.)? Do you remember anything that you learned as a child about Scriptures (what’s in them, where they came from, what you should think about them, etc.)?
3. Do you recall anything about the way your parents or other people around you viewed or talked about Scriptures when you were growing up?
4. What do you recall about the way you viewed Scriptures as a child? Why did you view them in this way? (Note: Even people who were not brought up with a religion would have heard something about Scriptures through school, personal conversations, or other channels, and can therefore be expected to have developed some kind of opinion about them.)
5. How do you view Scriptures now? Has your thinking changed since you were a child? Why or why not?
6. When was the last time you opened a book of Scripture on your own? What motivated you to do so? If you don’t remember, can you imagine any situation in which you might choose to read something in a book of Scripture?

## Religious Site Visit

For this assignment, you will visit a synagogue, church, and/or mosque during a religious service and write a two- to three-page report about the ways in which Scriptures are used in the service. Make sure to address all of the questions listed below; do not simply summarize what happened during the service. A good paper will require two to three pages of text.

- What does their book of Scripture look like?
- Where is the book of Scripture located during the worship service? How does it get there (already present, carried in procession, carried by pastor, etc.)?
- How are the Scriptures used during the worship service (when read, by whom, what does the congregation do before/during/after the readings, etc.)?
- Do the members of the congregation carry their own copies of Scripture? Are copies available to them at their seats? Do they use any other materials that contain excerpts from books of Scripture?
- Do the members read along in their own books of Scripture (or other printed materials that include scriptural references), or do they simply listen to the readings?
- Is there any kind of sermon/homily/commentary on the Scripture readings? If so, when does it take place in relation to the Scripture readings (immediately after or later in the service)?
- Does the speaker refer to specific verses of Scripture during the sermon, or is the message only loosely related to the text?
- What kind of message or lesson (if any) does the speaker draw from the text?
- Are there any other parts of the service that refer directly or indirectly to verses, stories, or ideas from the group's Scriptures?