Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1986 Volume I: The Family in Literature

The Family and Identity

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INTRODUCTION

Of late I have noticed that many of my students seem concerned—if not panicked—about their futures. They express such a concern in a variety of ways. Some students display little initiative; rather, they demand constant direction and adopt a totally reactive stance. Others exhibit blatantly regressive behavior. Seniors call this syndrome “senioritis,” but they rarely discuss its causes, symptoms, or ramifications. I see it as a sort of identity crisis. My students are scared, and they are in some cases desperately seeking to avoid the adult world which awaits them.

It is my hope that devising a unit on the family and identity may create a forum for students which will enable them to deal constructively with their emergence into the adult world. Through discussion, reading, and writing they can explore the things they are feeling, but may not have articulated. I believe it would prove beneficial for my students to consider the notion of identity development, especially with regard to the relationships and values of the family.

I would like them to begin to consider their own past family experiences and their past and present reactions to these experiences. I hope that, as a result, they will develop a consciousness about their feelings, their actions, and/or their values. Ultimately they might consider such questions as: Who am I? How have I changed? Where am I going? With the development of a consciousness about the self and others comes a sense of the freedom and responsibility that an adult experiences. But the transition from youthful tentativeness to adult maturity is not an immediate one, and students will be encouraged to realize this. In short, this unit is meant to encourage students to take the initiative and/or begin to know, like, and trust themselves.

Literature will provide the impetus for discussion. I have chosen works which consider the conflict between generations as such conflict appears to be an immediate “real” concern for my students. They will consider the many reasons for the “generation gap,” such as personality differences, varying life-styles, and societal pressures.

This approach to literature will also serve another purpose: it will underscore for my students the relevance of studying literature to individual development. By delineating human experience, literature provides insight and comfort. Through reading, students may come to realize that literature can speak to their needs by

providing encouragement in ideas and comfort in the portrayal of human emotion.

I've deliberately chosen works which cover several genres and several cultures. Poetry, the short story, and the novel are considered in order to underscore the relevance of varying literary forms. Further, the literatures of various cultures are considered for the purpose of broadening student awareness of the human condition. Such works may also provide students with a sense of the universality of their anxieties.

The various forms of literature in this unit are ordered according to both length and sophistication. Thus students will be introduced first to the theme of identity and the family by way of "On Children" by Kahlil Gibran. The two poems which will follow, "Grandpa Schuler" and "Sestina of Youth and Age," provide two perspectives of the generation gap, yet both deal as well with youth's search for identity.

With the study of fiction (short story, novel) comes a broadening of the theme. Students will consider experiences of parents and children amidst varying societal and cultural backdrops. The short stories to be considered are both American, but they reflect two distinct views of the American experience. "Almos A Man" considers the coming of age of a black boy in the country, "Prelude" of a white boy in the city.

The length and form of the novel allow a more complete picture of family issues. *Cry , The Beloved Country* provides the reader with varied examples of parent/child relationships, and, equally important, places familial relationships in the context of societal issues. In a sense, *Cry , The Beloved Country* is the quintessential family work, for it connects the very notion of family to larger philosophical and religious constructs. From this, students can see that their problems are set within the structure of family; and that the concerns of the family extend to concerns of society at large.

I hope that *Cry , The Beloved Country* , the culminating work of this unit, will enable students to recognize in literature the traditional expression of values that is communicated from generation to generation. *City, The Beloved Country* is primarily a modern extension of the most influential of books to emerge from western culture, The Bible.

The Class Discussion: Purpose and Plan

Though students will be required to respond to the works read in prose of their own, this unit's primary strategy for learning involves discussion and/or the direct sharing of ideas and feelings. It seems to me that much of the enjoyment which comes from reading emerges when one articulates intellectual and emotional insights to an immediate responsive audience. Discussion often makes our own thought visible; the immediacy of response to thoughts enables one to push ahead to a clearer understanding of the work and the self. I believe this phenomenon takes place in Institute seminars; it should also take place in public school classrooms. Though much of reading and learning is of a solitary nature, a "community component" of discussion and exchange of ideas enlivens, broadens, and enriches all participants.

Yet, it is no secret that the most difficult role of the teacher is that of discussion leader. Many of our students have had little experience in the mode of give and take communication. One has only to spend some little time in the hallway of a school to realize that students (for many reasons) talk at rather than with even each other. Thus the first hurdle which must be overcome before discussion can occur in a classroom is the promotion of students' acceptance of the very activity of discussion. The teacher must introduce discussion as a format in a careful almost surreptitious way. Spontaneous and natural discussion permits students to test their thoughts and/or discover something about themselves. In order for this to happen students must be touched somehow personally. Thus the issues at hand must be of interest to them and,they must be able to

draw upon their own life experiences when articulating their opinions. In short, the leading questions (which are developed by the teacher) must be well-thought-out and directly connected to the lives of the participating students because such questions are the catalysts for effective discussions.

Obviously, there is much more to be said about the art of leading discussion. Learning to do it well involves much in the way of learning to think on one's feet; it is a personal achievement. Yet, the first step of posing the appropriate question is less idiosyncratic and will be addressed in this unit.

Warm-up Exercises

Warm-up activities apart from literature will serve to

1. introduce the activity of discussion and
2. introduce the topic.

Activity 1:

This first activity requires individual and anonymous response on the part of students. That is, students will be asked to complete some value response statements in writing;, though I won't read their statements since they will be too personal, I believe students will welcome this opportunity to express their opinions.

Statements:

1. I usually do/do not agree with my parents on important matters because . . .
2. I could/could not get along fine if I left home now because . . .
3. I do/do not respect my parents because . . .
4. I will/will not raise my children differently than my parents raised me because . . . [1]

The above exercise is meant to introduce the topic of relationships between parents and children to students on a personal level and implicitly underscores the value of their thoughts and feelings. Though students' individual problems will not be discussed openly in class, the exercise acknowledges possible familial conflicts among students and the value of students' own thinking through these issues.

Activity 2:

This second warm-up exercise serves to promote the activity of discussion. It provides students with a vignette which depicts a teen-ager in a value conflict with his/her parents. The conflict raised in this vignette

must be controversial; controversy enables a student to identify his position and encourages him to give reasons for this position. Thus the teacher should set the stage for disagreement. (Example: disagreement about inter-faith or inter-racial dating.) This exercise encourages students to: articulate the conflicting values, discuss consequences to the teenager's action or inaction, express opinions as to what the teen-ager's response should be. [2] It calls upon students to respond to a hypothetical situation intellectually as well as emotionally. In this way students articulate beliefs and reasons for beliefs.

Introduction to Literature

With the introduction of literature the personal becomes connected to or set with the universal. There is a need to form questions which still affect students personally, yet also raise universal or philosophical issues. These are questions to ponder over which elicit few definitive answers but which tell us much about ourselves in our answers. "On Children" from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* seems a good place to start because this work easily lends itself to both personal and philosophical thought.

Gibran speaks for the sanctity of the individuality of children: "You may house their bodies, but not their souls." "On Children" is also a religious work which defines man as an unknowing instrument of God's plan: "The Archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and Hebends you with His might . . . " In essence, this work is a warning to all parents who might wish to unduly influence or hold their children. At its core is a belief in the evolutionary nature of mankind.

Students should be encouraged to go through the poem line by line and articulate its meaning in their own words, for such articulation will draw out their own thoughts and feelings. It will also be necessary to discuss Gibran's use of personification such as, "They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself," and the use of symbolism, "The Archer sees his mark..," in order to get at Gibran's philosophy or view of life; the personification of life and God is a curious and oft-used way of calling upon man's faith in what is essentially unknowable.

Discussion questions will follow a basic understanding of Gibran's work, and will not broach the subject of the existence of God for obvious reasons. Rather, questions will probe the the relationship between parent and child, the evolutionary nature of man, and the structure of the family.

Questions

1. Exactly what does the following line mean? Can parents raise their children without giving them their thoughts? "You may give them your love but not your thoughts."
2. Is it important for parents to instill values in their children? If so, when should such education cease? Can parents really seek to be like their children? "You may seek to be like them, but seek not to make them like you."
3. What does the following statement mean? Is the past a burden? Is it necessary to understand the past? "For life goes not forward nor tarries with yesterday."

Related Questions/Structure of the Family:

1. Should one view one's family as important above all? Why? Why not?
2. Why does society depend upon the structure of the family? Do all societies function around the structure of family or a similar structure?
3. Does the family structure work well? What are the positive and negative consequences of family structure?

Though the questions above may seem to go "all around the barn and back" or drift far afield from the work at hand, they perform two useful functions for students. First, they illustrate the purpose of literature; that is, literary works should promote thought and questioning. Second, the questions encourage students to think abstractly and/or question that which is often simply accepted.

During the course of discussion students will be encouraged to articulate reasons for their beliefs; they should call upon their own education and life experiences to support their opinions. Doing so will enable them to realize the value of these experiences. "Can you give me an example?" will probably be an oft-repeated (teacher) question.

It also occurs to me that a creative writing assignment should follow a discussion of this nature. Such an assignment will encourage students to create images for their own feelings and/or react to the issues raised in discussion. This written articulation of ideas may help them sort out their thoughts at leisure.

LITERATURE

The works to be considered, as mentioned, will ultimately serve as beginning places for discussions on the relationships between parent and child and identity. Thus "large",issue-oriented,leading questions will have their place. However, it will be necessary, also, to view the works at hand as art-forms whose structures have meanings which should not be over-looked. I believe that students should become conscious of the artistic choices which are made by author and poet. To do so is to enjoy meaning in a conscious way. To do so is also to better understand the human being in the artist. Of course, the length of this unit precludes in-depth structural analysis of all of the works considered. During the course of this unit, students will consider such literary devices as point of view, symbolism, tone, methods of characterization, and setting. They will not, however, consider such devices all at once nor all with regard to each work read. Thus, for example, where symbolism seems to be of marked importance, symbolism will be studied; symbolism may be overlooked in another work whose meaning is more clearly tied with point of view. Once again, the study of literary devices occurs not for its own sake (in this unit) but rather as another way to approach meaning With a view toward discussion.

POETRY

The two poems at hand were chosen because they both consider the generation gap or the necessary distance between parent and child due to differences in age and life experiences. Though their subject is the same, their themes emerge differently. They are two works which are antithetic to one another, for they are expressed through varying points of view, tones, and rhythmic structures. One understands each better for having read the other.

“Grandpa Schuler”

This poem of two stanzas underscores “life passages” by gently revealing the inability of a grandfather to see what he once was as reflected in the personality of his grandson. The poem captures the exuberance of youth in its recreation of what might have been the grandfather’s past exclamation: “The whole land of Germany wasn’t wide enough!” The grandson echoes this sentiment: “(I want) to go where the land is new!” Instead of rekindling a spirit of adventure in the grandfather, such a sentiment causes the grandfather to wonder “What are young fools coming to?”

In one sense the poem is gently satiric. A few words sum up the grandfather’s present situation: “He has a sleek farm . . . ” ” He is patriarchal with his sons and daughters everywhere.” The poem seeks to point out that it is easy to forget the exuberant spirit of youth after one has lived through it and built upon it. Though the grandfather subtly admits that he was once a “fool,” he has difficulty in understanding his grandson’s motivation for adventure or the conquering of new worlds. After all, the societal implications of life in Prussian Germany versus life in the “new world” are quite different. The poem underscores the difficulty of communication between generations, for it enables us to see that perspectives on life change with the accumulation of life experiences. We also note that generations inevitably grow up in different worlds, for societal implications or pressures are ever-changing. Thus the youth of one generation is by necessity somewhat different from another. Yet, the characteristics of youth (exuberance) and old age (reflection) remain. What is endearing about this poem is its portrait of a sound family ever capable of producing confident youth with “shining eyes.” The generation gap is seen with humor and under standing in part because of the poem’s omniscient point of view.

“Sestina of Youth and Age”

In contrast to “Grandpa Schuler,” this poem is created out of the complex structure of the sestina which complements its more complex theme, its sadder tone. The relationship between a father and son is sketched out by the son himself in a tribute to his deceased father. This is a poignant poem which seriously addresses the generation gap: “Youth sees wide chasms between itself and Age—How could I think he, too, had lived my life?”, and attests to the possibility of closure of the gap with the inevitable maturing of the young. Yet, the tone is somber for, in this case, the son lost his father before maturation could take place. (“Had I but known that he could feel and care!”) The poem also reveals the difficulties of age, and the (unspecified) pain the father endured. (“Free . . . from that old Care, The hard relentless torturer of his age, that cooled his youth . . . ”) The son, too, “must fight with Care,” and will do so understanding all meanings of that word (as expressed in the poem) for his father’s legacy is a view of life which acknowledges *Care* (trouble) *carefull* y and *caringly* .

The poem, above all, expresses the love of a father for his son, and a son’s resultant maturation and reciprocal ability to love and care: “He prayed more earnestly to win my hopes/ Than ever for his own . . . ”

Questions

Level I (Structural Analysis/Literary Devices)

1. What is the tone of each work? How do you know? What words tell you?
2. How is tone connected to the point of view used by each poet?
3. Which of the poems is more complex in structure? How is structure connected to theme?
4. Which poem is better?

Level II (Questions for Broader Discussion)

1. Think of movies and television shows which use the generation gap as a source for comedy . . . for tragedy.
(Discuss.) Is the generation gap inevitable? When is it positive? When is it negative?
2. How much of the generation gap is due to varying ages of the parties involved? How much is due to personality differences? . . . societal changes? (Discuss.)

Project Role-playing of generation gap situation. Participants reverse roles. Afterwards discuss the experience of role-reversal.

SHORT STORIES

"Almos a Man" and "Prelude" provide much fodder for a comparative study. Both depict family life in conjunction with larger society, and both reveal differences in response to the outside world on the part of parents and their offspring. Yet, these stories are more different than they are alike. One reflects rural society while the other reflects urban society. One emphasizes the conflicts inherent in the process of maturation while the other emphasizes outside societal conflicts which over-shadow the process of maturation. Perhaps the key to understanding the thematic variance is to be found in a considered study of their varied points of view. Of course, the plots of these stories differ; yet, the resultant themes have much to do with point of view, and thus point of view will be the focus of the analysis of these works.

"Almos a Man"

Plot: Dave, a black seventeen-year-old who is grappling with procuring his identity as a man, serves as the focal point of this story. We are privy to his thoughts, words, and actions throughout as the author employs

the third person point of view. While Dave views himself as “almos a man,” he is seen by others, especially his parents, as a mere child. Thus his mother collects his pay and tells him when to wash while his father threatens him with physical punishment when he errs.

For Dave, proof that he has reached manhood lies in the procurement of a gun: “ . . . and if he were holding this gun in his hand nobody (black or white) could overrun him; they would have to respect him.” After much wheedling of his mother, Dave is given two dollars from his paycheck to buy the gun, but he is told he must bring it home to his father. Dave does not bring the gun home immediately, but, like a child, delights in imaginary play with it. The following morning he manages to steal out of the house; his plan is to fire the gun before relinquishing it to his father. Through Dave’s experience, we learn that the gun is unreliable. His first shot goes astray and kills a mule belonging to the white man he and his father work for. What follows Dave’s vain attempt to lie about the death of the mule is his total humiliation before a large, laughing audience through his father’s questions, orders, and ultimate promise of punishment.

Dave never relinquishes the gun as a symbol of manhood, and later that same evening leaves his house once more to successfully fire it. Faced with two years of working to pay for the mule and the promised beating from his father, Dave decides to turn his back on his family and run away to “somewhere where he could be a man.”

Analysis The point of view of this story enables the reader to completely understand the feelings of the main character, Dave. We are not privy to the thoughts of his mother or father so that when Dave exclaims:. “They treat me lika mule . . . N then they beat me . . . N Ma had t tell on me.” We are sympathetic. Though we know that running away is a drastic step for a boy who never realized he was cheated (with a defective gun), we understand why Dave must do so. Largely because of the choice of the third person point of view, this is a story which leaves the reader with a feeling of uneasiness and many unresolved questions. One begins to think about the workings of this family. Why is the father so harsh? Why is the son so naive? Answers are not readily available, yet hints are given as to the social system of which this family is a part. Though the boy is seventeen, there is no mention of college or training for him. He will follow his father as a field worker for a white landowner. The family is hard-working yet poor. The father is hyper-critical of Dave and especially concerned about Dave’s working relationship with the landowner. Is this the only job possibility for Dave? Is the family trapped in a situation that is irrevocable? Or is the father’s harsh treatment of Dave meant to ready him for a harsh world? One can only speculate; yet, the choice of a gun as a symbol of manhood underscores a sense of powerlessness that Dave perhaps only unconsciously feels and wishes to overcome.

“Prelude”

Plot: While “Prelude” is a story of anti-semitism it also considers the responses of young and old family members to inequity. It is told from the first person point of view, and thus enables the reader to directly experience the conflict which engulfs this family. The son, Harry, narrates the story with an eye toward revealing the feelings and motives for actions (or inaction as the case may be) of all family members. The reader sees Harry as a reliable narrator who understands both his own reactions and the reactions of his father and sister.

“Prelude” takes place in Chicago during the Depression and just prior to U.S. involvement in World War II. This is a tense time for Jewish immigrants who are often the targets of abuse from bitter disenfranchised youth. Such is the case of the Silversteins.

We first note the taunts that Harry must contend with as he approaches his father's news-stand. We learn that a gang of unemployed boys has been harassing all members of the family for some time. The police have been notified but are unable to provide continuous watch over the business establishment. We also learn that parent and children react differently to the harassment. Son and daughter are quick to anger and respond verbally with the injustice of such treatment. The father is more philosophical, and articulates reasons for the perpetrators' behavior. Though the son is able to understand his father's point of view, the daughter, once riled, will not be passive: "Not even the Governor of the State could make her be quiet."

We also learn that the father is unwell and increasingly upset about events which are taking place in Europe. He tells his son that there is nowhere to go; they must learn to deal with social conditions in this country for there is no alternative.

The climax of the story occurs when the gang enters the news-stand with the expressed purpose of humiliating the family. They choose a time when there are few people around and proceed to taunt the son and destroy the contents of the shop. Through it all the father remains passive; he only pleads with the boys to "go home and eat." Passersby simply gawk at the scene despite the daughter's pleas for help.

When the police finally arrive, the damage has been done. The shop has been vandalized, the gang has escaped, and the family is bound together in tears of frustration and futility. Neither the father's passivity nor the daughter's warning (" . . . after they get us down they'll go after you!") has yielded adequate response. Fascism is on the rise.

Analysis: At the story's core is the portrayal of the ugliness of fascism. However, a secondary theme emerges when we consider the lives of the members of this urban family. The children grow up quickly amidst overt gestures of anti-semitism. It should also be noted that this family is isolated in a gentile neighborhood and thus faces the spectre of prejudice alone. Yet, it is the choice of the son as narrator which enables this story to portray a closure of the generation gap and/or a unification of family. Had the story been told from the daughter's point of view, it would have been a different story, indeed.

Though the son often disagrees with the father's passivity, he, unlike his sister, is also aware and responsive to his father's concerns. In this story father and son are united because of outside adversity; Harry echoes his father's feelings when he thinks of the news-stand as a "kind of island; if they left they'd be under the waves."

Questions

Level I Questions/Activities

1. Compare and contrast the themes of the two stories.
2. What part does setting play in the reader's understanding of the concerns of the sons?
3. Account for the relationship between father and son in each work.
4. Why did each author choose a particular point of view? (Compare and contrast points of view.) How is the theme of each work affected by point of view?

Level II Broader Discussion Questions

1. How might relationships among family members be affected by outside pressures?
2. Might different families react differently to similar pressures? If so, why?
3. Are family members necessarily conscious of outside pressures? Explain.

THE NOVEL: Cry, The Beloved Country

Cry, The Beloved Country is an immensely complex novel; approaching it with a view toward a summing up and analysis is daunting, and frankly seems almost absurd, for this novel, in essence, calls men forth to share and discuss the human condition. Thus, the novel represents the beginning of thought and discussion for its readers. Discussion may follow any number of roads, for *Cry* , *The Beloved Country* is a political novel, a sociological novel, a psychological novel, a historical novel, a philosophical novel, a parable . . . An analysis of family and identity in *Cry* , *The beloved Country* represents only the beginning of what will be enlarged upon in broader class discussions.

I do feel compelled somehow to try to capture the tone of the novel before providing my analysis. So, I include below a portion of a student's poem which I believe speaks eloquently of the vision of Alan Paton (although, in fact, it was not written in response to the novel.)

> And behind all this darkness
> yes, there is some light
> small, wondrous, out of sight
> It grows sometimes
> and sometimes fades
> falling into darkness, making shades
> With love and hate
> both at war
> we hold together
> but together we are no more
> The world (is) flowing through
> endless boundaries
> of yesterday, today, and tomorrow
> bringing with it a game of
> time, life, and death
> The strongest of the strong
> will surpass the ultimate
> quest of power. [3]

Analysis

Family relationships play an important part in the individual's quest for meaning and fulfillment in *Cry , The Beloved Country* . When Paton explains the breakup of the tribal culture through a spokesman, Msimangu, it is made clear that the annihilation of the family structure was a key factor. When adolescents left the village, they left important beliefs behind, but perhaps more important is the fact that they also left behind familial connections; such ties might have prevented their ultimate surrender to the abyss of the anti-cultural existence of so much of black Johannesburg. Msimangu states emphatically that the white minority has destroyed a culture without attempting to replace it. Though one might state that the act of destroying culture is most heinous, Paton's book deals pragmatically with the need for building a new culture. At the center of this novel is the belief that no man is an island; man attains fulfillment only when he is connected to family, society, and, ultimately, God.

This novel finds its center in the beliefs of Christianity. Therefore its answers for philosophical, political,and sociological problems are always, in some sense, Christian. One can easily trace various biblical parables throughout the novel. Perhaps what needs to be underscored at this juncture, though, is man's understanding of his relationship with (the Christian) God. It is the familial structure inherent in Christianity that provides man with a place and an understanding of the meaning of that place. Man is the son of God and brother of all other members of mankind. It seems to me that Paton's cry for love, trust, and peace and the annihilation of hate, fear, and conflict can only be heard by those who understand and champion the relationships inherent in the family.

Though Paton provides many familial relationships among characters who are not blood-related, and thus illustrates the existence of a larger brotherhood of mankind, I believe it would prove worthwhile to discuss his examples of relationships between biological fathers and sons. These relationships are perhaps most germane to Paton's exploration of the experience of family.

Paton implies parallelism in the two main father/ son relationships of Stephen and Absalom Kumalo and James and Arthur Jarvis. There are also additional father/ son relationships in the novel—relationships which include those of John and Matthew Kumalo and Col. and John Harrison. Each of these examples of father/son relationships offers an illustration of the conflict between generations and/or the legacy of the interaction of familial and societal forces.

Absalom Kumalo/ Stephen Kumalo

There are many religious overtones inherent in the relationship of Stephen and Absalom Kumalo. The name Absalom calls to mind the biblical Absalom who was tricked by friends who eventually caused his death. The name Stephen calls to mind St. Stephen, a Christian martyr. Stephen Kumalo has also been likened to Job, for like Job, Stephen finds his faith tested time and time again. The story of Absalom and Stephen Kumalo has much to do with forgiveness and the re-establishment of familial ties. In fact, the Christian values of faith and forgiveness are nearly lost by both Absalom and Stephen; it is the strength of their relationship that enables each to find acceptance (of life and himself) and ultimately, peace.

The loss of Absalom is most poignant, for his story illustrates how tenuous Christian values and beliefs can be in the face of cold and harsh society. When Absalom leaves home for Johannesburg he embodies a Christian upbringing. However, like so many who have left the valley before him, he is soon swallowed up in the teeming inhumanity of the city. Absalom is, in many ways, a victim. He is young—too young to be left in a Gomorrah without guidance or familial ties of any sort. In fact, Absalom loses his very humanity in this city,

and like many others leads a thoughtless animal-like existence. Christian love is replaced by fear in this environment, and Absalom becomes only a reactive being. Thus the senseless and accidental shooting of Arthur Jarvis is made clear. Blind animal fear motivated Absalom to kill Jarvis. This incident leaves Absalom confused and all but shattered.

When Stephen first sees Absalom in jail, he is struck by a shell of a man who was once his son. Absalom's hand is described as cold and lifeless. Stephen cannot reach his son. Indeed, there is little communication between parent and child on any level. Stephen is angered by the passivity of his son. He cannot understand why Absalom shows little emotion, and he especially cannot forgive Absalom's apparent lack of remorse. At the same time, Absalom is consumed by fear and shame. The relationship between father and son is all but severed, for both are dulled by the enormity of the situation, and both are near despair.

Over time, and especially by the time of Absalom's marriage, the relationship of father and son is gradually mended. Stephen learns to forgive Absalom, and Absalom is able to rely on his father to sustain him in his terror. Absalom is finally able to acknowledge his own guilt and yet forgive himself; ultimately, Absalom's dignity and humanity are restored.

Perhaps what saves both Stephen and Absalom and their relationship is the existence of Absalom's unborn child. The unborn child provides father and son with a new beginning—a way to maintain a bond even after Absalom's death. Both Stephen and Absalom learn that the meaning of life is a mystery, yet together they resolve to believe in and work for the sanctity of life. Stephen, like James Jarvis, will carry out part of the legacy he learned by way of his son's experience. If a new generation is composed of men like Jarvis' grandson (the "bright one") and Stephen's grandson, Peter (named for the founder of the Church), there is hope for the spiritual evolution of mankind and meaningful existence.

Arthur Jarvis/ James Jarvis

Arthur Jarvis has been likened to Christ because he is sacrificed during his quest for the betterment of mankind. Indeed, Arthur appears to have modeled his life on great men of vision (Christ, Lincoln) leaders who displayed concern not only for upright men but for sinners or enemies as well. Some critics have taken this Christian analogy one step further to liken James to God. Thus Arthur left the heaven of his father's high land to teach those below the meaning of love and Christian charity. I feel, however, that this extension of the analogy does not work, for James is not God-like or all-knowing but is rather just the opposite (at least initially). Though one might discover many Christian lessons in the story of Arthur and James, it is primarily an illustration of the "son as father."

James is the white counterpart of Stephen Kumalo. Both fathers are initially ignorant of Johannesburg and all it stands for. Neither man comprehends the spiritual and moral decay of his beloved country until he is confronted personally with it through the death of his son. Both men lose their sons, but gain, as a result, a truer vision of the world and their responsibilities toward the world; both men develop a more active and charitable view toward all men.

The relationship between Arthur and his father, James, is in many ways ironic. James must lose Arthur before he can "gain" him. That is, it is only through Arthur's death that James can be led to discover and embrace his son's philosophy. It is curious that James comes to know his son only after he is dead. The spirit of Arthur is essentially conveyed to James through Arthur's writings. We learn then that while interpersonal communication failed to unite father and son, Arthur's public declaration of beliefs (in speeches read by his father) enabled a personal understanding and acceptance to develop.It is perhaps important to note that

James needed to accept Arthur as a man before he could entirely embrace him as a son.

One of the questions that James asks himself and his wife repeatedly is “Where did Arthur learn to become what he was?” It is ironic that James is unable to attribute any of Arthur’s achievements to his own parenting, for the reader sees much of James in Arthur. It is clear that the basic foundation of Arthur’s beliefs was learned at home. This explains why James never contemplates revenge for the death of his son and why James is immediately ready to learn about his country and broaden his acts of kindness. It is clear that this kindness was ever-present in James and needed only to be redirected. Thus, during the course of the novel, we see the further development of James, the man, rather than the redeeming of a soul. James has always understood the dignity of mankind; his treatment of Stephen (and eventually all of Stephen’s people) is intuitive rather than learned. By the end of the book James and Arthur are truly united. James carries on the spirit of his son through works of generosity and thoughtfulness. Because of Arthur’s legacy, James’ familial concern is no longer limited, but belongs to all of mankind.

Matthew Kumalo/ John Kumalo

The relationship between John and Matthew Kumalo provides a stark contrast to those of the main characters discussed above. Though John Kumalo manages to procure a lawyer for Matthew and thereby save his son from punishment, his motive for doing so is more selfish than paternalistic. One suspects that John saves his son only in order to preserve his own status. It is made clear time and again that John is apathetic to his son’s deeds and even his whereabouts. Indeed, John is apathetic generally to the needs and concerns of others. He abandons his first wife, he turns his back on Stephen and Absalom, and at every turn he shamelessly steps on his own people in order to attain a better vantage point for himself.

John Kumalo represents those who are consumed by a need for self-aggrandizement. Though he scoffs at the tribal chiefs and sees religion simply as an opiate for the masses, John is never able to articulate or for that matter envision a replacement for the old values and social structures. He has neither the intellect nor the soul to put his powerful voice to use for the good of mankind. Thus John Kumalo is lost. More important, the legacy he leaves for his son and his son’s sons is one of fear, nihilism, and ultimate destruction.

And yet, it must be stated that John Kumalo and those like him are victimized by a ruthless state which strips man of his dignity and worth. Though one cannot condone the actions of the John Kumalos of this world, one can certainly understand the process of their victimization.

John Harrison/ Col. Harrison

The relationship between John Harrison and his father is in some ways similar to that of Matthew and John Kumalo, for Col. Harrison is like John Kumalo in his limited view of the world, and like John Kumalo, he exerts at least a limited influence over his son. Col. Harrison has been likened to the stock character of Col. Blimp. He believes in the supremacy of Englishmen, and this belief relieves him of the responsibility of thought or action. That John Harrison disagrees with his father and admires Arthur Jarvis is not surprising. John’s position in South African society affords him the luxury of thought. Unfortunately, John Harrison is capable *only* of echoing Arthur’s thoughts; he cannot translate thought to action and thus, ironically, is no more a force for good than is his father.

It seems to me that the relationship of Col. and John Harrison underscores the importance of familial values. Though John Harrison may be able to adopt a value system other than that of his father, he seems to be missing the background which would enable him to put his newly formed values to good use. Though forces in

society allow John some growth, he, like Matthew Kumalo, will to some extent bear the legacy of his father's mistakes. Also important is the fact that John may never be able to acknowledge his father in himself.

Conclusion

The four father/son relationships discussed above seem to illustrate a basic tenet needed for the ideal father/son relationship. That is, that fathers and sons must ultimately regard one another as brothers who have much to learn from one another. Yet, it is important to note that Paton's vision primarily suggests that men must forever see themselves as sons of God. The adoption of and adherence to Christian values enables these sons to do good works or embrace the brotherhood of mankind. The secret that Stephen so often speaks of during the course of the novel is in part delineated through the metaphor of family. Paton states that only love will save the land and the people of South Africa. The primal love of a father for a son must be built upon and/or enlarged to insure the continuance or re-emergence of Christian order.

Ideas for Lessons: Cry, The Beloved Country

I. Provide students with background material

A. Relevant biblical stories
B. History of South Africa

II. Level One Discussion Questions/ Activities

A. Compare/contrast the parallel relationships of Stephen/Absalom Kumalo and James/Arthur Jarvis. Why does Paton include both?
B. Discuss John Kumalo's views of justice, government, and religion. Why does John hold such views?
C. To what extent is Matthew Kumalo influenced by his father's views?
D. Compare/contrast the parallel relationships Col./ John Harrison and John/ Matthew Kumalo. Specifically account for the similarities and differences between Matthew Kumalo and John Harrison.
E. How far do the agricultural demonstrator's ideas undermine those of Stephen Kumalo?
F. Is Arthur Jarvis a Christ figure? What method of characterization does Paton employ in delineating the character of Arthur? Why?
G. What is the theme of the novel? How is the notion of family connected with this theme?
H. Why are the family issues all treated only through males? Is there a failure on Paton's part to take women seriously?

III. Level Two Discussion Questions/Activities

A. Is *Cry , The Beloved Country* essentially a Christian parable? Are the characters simply representational types, or are they full-blown realistic creations?
B. Discuss the Christian concepts of forgiveness, faith, and the redemptive value of suffering with regard to *Cry , The Beloved Country* .
C. Are Paton's solutions for the problem of South Africa acceptable or satisfying to you, the reader?
D. According to Paton,is the desire for and/or attainment of power antithetic to the Christian ethic? Express your own views on the subject of power.
E. How important an influence is family in the development of character according to Paton? Do you agree with Paton's view? What are the implications of such a view?
F. Is *Cry , The Beloved Country* a hopeful novel?

IV. Level Three Writing Assignment/ Discussion Compare/contrast Gibran's religious ideas as expressed in The Prophet with those of Paton as expressed in Cry , The Beloved Country.

Student Reading List

POETRY
"On Children"—Kahlil Gibran

"Grandpa Schuler"—Ruth Suckow

"Sestina of Youth and Age"—Frank Gelett Burgess

SHORT STORIES
"Almos a Man"—Richard Wright

"Prelude"—Albert Halper

NOVEL
Cry , The Beloved Country —Alan Paton

Notes

1. Carl A, Elder, *Making Value Judgements* : *Decisions for Today* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972) p. 33.
2. *Ibid.* , p. 31.
3. Tara Achane (student— Cooperative High School)

Teacher Bibliography

Anderson, Maxwell. *Lost in the Stars* New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950.

This musical based on *City, The Beloved Country* might serve as en introduction to the lengthy novel.

Elder, Carl A. *Making Value Judgements* : *Decisions for Today* . Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1972.

Elder's book provides the teacher with many interesting exercises which help students to think through their own value systems.

Hughes, Langston, editor. *The Best Short Stories by Negro Writers* . Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967.

This fine collection of short works covers many family issues of the past end the present.

Kaplan, Milton end Rockowitz, Murray, editors. *The World of Poetry* . New York: Globe Book Co., 1965.

This anthology of poetry has something for everyone. It is themetically arranged, and includes "basic" as well as sophisticated writings.

Peton, Alen. *The Land and the People of South Africa* . Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1955.

Peton wrote this book especially for school children. It provides students with background material on South Africa.

Paton, Alen. *City, The Beloved Country* . New York: Scribners, 1950.

This is truly a marvelous "teaching" book. Its deceptively simple language masks e work of complexity. It is thought-provoking, lyrical, and most of all, memorable.

Taggard, Ernestine, editor. *Twenty Grend* : *Great American Short Stories* . New York: Bentam Books, 1981.

This anthology of short works primarily features young protagonists. These are stories which have been

chosen as favorites by high school students.