

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Contextual Bible Reading Study Guide has two sections. The first section is general information to help students understand the genre of the current book for LTCNW. The second section is for 7th-12th grade students only. These older graders will need to be familiar with both the first and second sections. The quiz questions will not ask students to define terms from these sections; instead, the students must apply these concepts to the passage in question (See Part 2 for examples). It might help to make flashcards to remember what each term means.

The second section will have example questions from this year's book(s) for the student to practice and apply the knowledge from the first section. Unlike the Bible Bowl study guide, we will not use these passages and questions at the convention.

PART 1: GENRE STUDY GUIDE

This year's book: Matthew (2023)

This year's genre: Gospel

The first four books of the New Testament have historically been referred to as "The Gospel." Gospel means good news. Gospel is very similar to last year's genre, "Narrative." Narrative is a fancy word that means story. Almost half of the Bible is in narrative form (~43%), which means that God's spirit thought stories were one of the best ways to help us understand God and our role in the cosmos. The Gospel accounts are a special kind of narrative which have much in common with ancient biographies.

An ancient biographer would write an account of a significant person's life. This writing would include a few critical birth or childhood stories but primarily focus on the subject's public debut and their most important contributions to society. The subject's death was also a matter of great importance and would demonstrate the subject's character in how they died. Anyone familiar with the Gospel accounts will see the similarities and significance of writing an ancient biography about Jesus the Christ. All the details and stories in the Gospels highlight the work, character, and role of Jesus as God's Messiah (Christ). We'll need to keep this purpose in mind as we think about the primary tool biographers use: narrative.

What is the shape of a story? Think of narratives as arcs or rollercoasters (see picture below). All stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Imagine hearing a story without one of these critical pieces; the story wouldn't make much sense! Characters in a narrative will encounter problems (usually one big problem) and then have a series of experiences until the problem is resolved or addressed. Unlike actual roller coasters, characters will end in a different place than when they started. Either they or the world will have changed in some way.

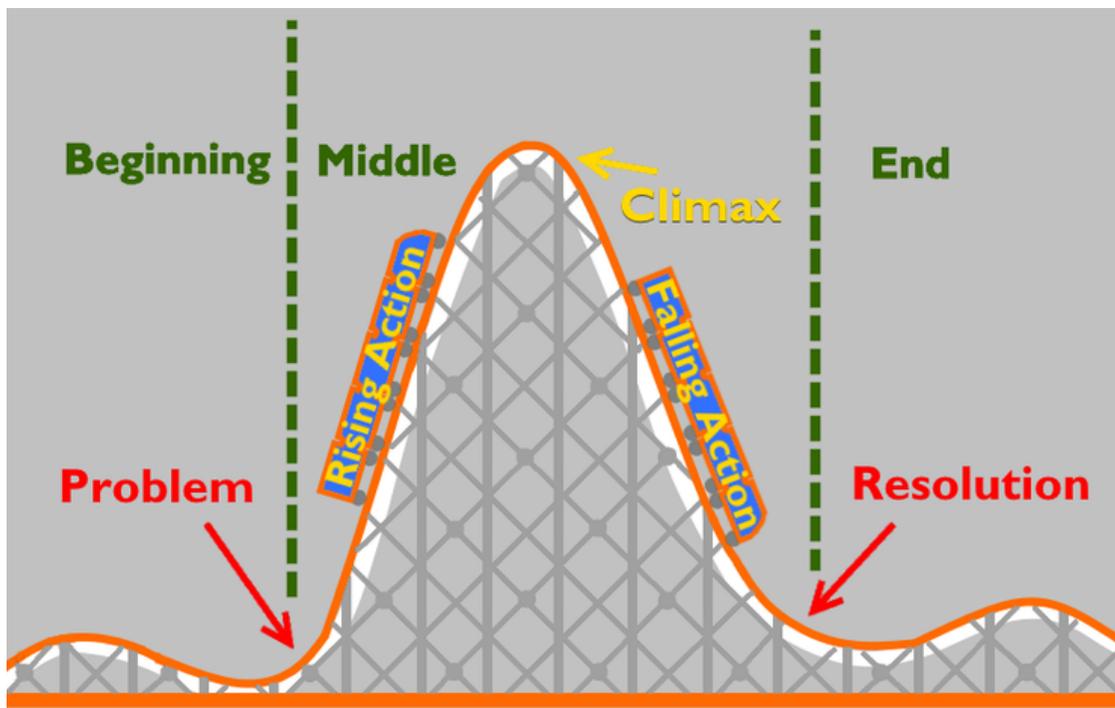
NARRATIVE REFERENCES:

- **3-6th Grade Terms and Definitions**

- **Characters:** The characters are those people, spiritual beings, and animals that are a part of the narrative arc.
 - **Main Character:** The main character (or protagonist) of a story is the primary character (or sometimes a group of characters) faced with the main problem. Their lives change

because of the problem, and the story revolves around their experience. Readers should consider the story from this perspective first.

- **Adversary:** The character opposing the protagonist (sometimes called the antagonist). Some stories have antagonists; sometimes problems are non-characters. A careful reader will also consider the story from this person or group's perspective.
- **Supporting Characters:** Those characters who help, hinder, or interact with the main character in various ways. Readers should also consider these characters' perspectives.
- **Main problem:** The central dilemma that the protagonist is trying to overcome. Sometimes the main problem is resolved within a narrative arc, and the protagonist no longer has to worry about the problem. Sometimes, it gets worse or changes in nature. Regardless, the main problem will always be central to the plot and will be addressed in some way before the end of the story.
- **Resolution:** When the main problem is addressed in a significant way, this is called the resolution. The resolution brings the story to a close. Sometimes details follow that wrap up the loose ends of the narrative, but the resolution brings the story to a conclusion.



The Narrative Roller Coaster

- **Additional Concepts for 3rd-6th Grade**

- **Author's meaning:** Authors write their stories to shape and change an audience. They do this by giving us an account of events in such a way to teach us about God, humans, and how we ought to live.
- **Gospel Accounts:** Our Bibles contain four different biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). We believe that each author was inspired to write a true and faithful account. One habit we want to reinforce at LTCNW is reading each account by itself first. If a passage in Matthew confuses us or we remember that Luke told a similar story, our first instinct is often to

look up the cross-reference “to get more details.” We encourage readers to resist this urge because the accounts were meant to be read first in their own context. Trying to make sense of a detail from Matthew by reading Luke’s version will only muddy the waters in what Matthew is trying to show with his unique account. Once the reader understands the narrative in its context, they should consider exploring the other accounts and why another author chose to include, exclude, or elucidate certain details.

- **7th-12th grade Definitions**

- **Introduction:** The introduction of a story provides the setting, characters, and context. The introduction is usually those details provided before the main character experiences the main problem.
- **Setting:** The setting is the location and place where the events in the narrative take place. In the Bible, places are often important for the events that took place there before. For example, Bethel appears as a place of worship throughout Israel’s history. The names of places often have meanings significant to the narrative (Bethel means “house of God”).
- **Rising Action:** After the main problem of a story occurs, things usually get worse and worse for the main character. This part of the story is called the rising action.
- **Climax:** Just when the main problem seems overwhelming, something will happen in the story to move it toward the resolution. This part of the story is also known as the turn because of how it turns events away from disaster and toward resolution. The climax is also a great way for the author to embed meaning and who or how they think a problem ought to be solved.
- **Falling Action:** The problem is not yet solved, but the main character is now working toward the solution, which may seem inevitable.
- **Conclusion:** After the resolution, the author often wraps up the story by giving concluding details or preparing the reader for subsequent stories.

- **Additional Terms for 7th-12th Grade**

- **Narrative Patterns and Cross-Reference:** Understanding individual stories is critical for a good reader, but the author is linking all of these stories together into a larger narrative. Good readers will pay attention to the overall flow of the story, character development between stories, and keywords and ideas as they are repeated. Additionally, Biblical authors are writing as part of scripture as a whole, so they will reference other scripture to make clear how this story fits into the entire Biblical narrative.
- **Ancient Context:** The Bible was written for us, but it was not written to us. We must remember that the Bible's authors were real people in a real context. This context is far removed from our situation, but we honor them by trying to understand them in their context as best we can. When we approach narratives, we ought to set our own questions, issues, and preconceptions aside and simply let the author teach us. Once we have done that for a good while, we can return to some of our own questions and concerns (if they are still relevant).

SECTION 2: EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

Example passage and questions for 3rd-6th Grade (Teacher's Guide):

Read this passage (Matthew 3:1-17) and answer the questions:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

1. Who is the main character (or protagonist)?
 - A. John the Baptist**
 - B. The people of Jerusalem and Judea
 - C. The Pharisees and Sadducees
 - D. Jesus
2. What is the main problem of the story?
 - A. John the Baptist is in the wilderness.
 - B. John has to "prepare the way of the Lord."**
 - C. John eats locusts and wild honey.
 - D. The people come to be baptized.
3. What is the resolution for the story?
 - A. John promises a baptism of fire and spirit.
 - B. Jesus comes from Galilee to be baptized.
 - C. John wants Jesus to baptize him.
 - D. John baptizes Jesus.**

4. Who acts as the adversary in this narrative?

- A. John the Baptist
- B. The people of Jerusalem and Judea
- C. The Pharisees and Sadducees**
- D. Jesus

5. What can you tell about the Pharisees and Sadducees from this passage?

- A. They didn't want to be baptized.
- B. They were angry with the people.
- C. Their actions didn't show repentance.**
- D. They were coming to spy on Jesus.

6. How is this story related to the one that comes before it (Jesus' birth and flight to Egypt - **Matthew 2**) and the one after it (Jesus' temptation in the wilderness - **Matthew 4**)? (Short Answer - 4 points)

(1) Jesus is a representative of Israel, born in the promised land, (like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph)

(2) Jesus and his family flee to Egypt (like Abraham and Joseph)

(3) Jesus returns to the promised land only to be brought back into the wilderness (Moses/Israel in the book of Numbers)

(4) Jesus led and empowered by the Spirit to overcome temptation and testing (New Israel that passes the test)

Example passage and questions for 7th-12th Grade (Teacher's Guide):

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1. What is the setting of the story?
 - A. Judea
 - B. The Jordan river**
 - C. Jerusalem
 - D. The way of the Lord

2. What is the main problem of the story?
 - A. John the Baptist is in the wilderness.
 - B. John has to "prepare the way of the Lord."**
 - C. John eats locusts and wild honey.
 - D. The people come to be baptized.

3. What is the resolution for the story?
 - A. John promises a baptism of fire and spirit.
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 - C. John wants Jesus to baptize him.
 - D. John baptizes Jesus.**

4. What is the climax (or turn) of the story?
- A. The people want to be baptized.
 - B. The Pharisees and Sadducees want to be baptized.
 - C. Jesus wants to be baptized.**
 - D. John baptizes Jesus.
5. What can you tell about the Pharisees and Sadducees from this passage?
- A. They didn't want to be baptized.
 - B. They were angry with the people.
 - C. Their actions didn't show repentance.**
 - D. They were coming to spy on Jesus.
6. This passage contains dozens of references to the Old Testament. Pick one of the references and explain how Matthew uses it to tell us something about John the Baptist, Jesus, Israel, and/or the good news (gospel). (Short Answer - 4 points)

Wilderness/Jordan River -

- (1) Israel's exile and/or wilderness wanderings,**
- (2) John the Baptist is calling for a return to the wilderness**
- (3) to repent and enter the land (through the Jordan River) again.**
- (4) Warns those who are not actually repenting of the consequences**

OR Quotation from Isaiah 40

- (1) Comfort after exile (Isaiah 40:1)**
- (2) Making straight the path for the Lord to return and make things right (Isaiah 40:3-5)**
- (3) Herald proclaiming the "good news" to all people (Isaiah 40:6-11)**
- (4) The time for the Lord to return is now (Isaiah 40:27-31)**

OR Wearing camel hair, leather belt, eating locusts and honey

- (1) John the Baptist is acting like the great prophet Elijah (2 Kings 1:8)**
- (2) John is living off the land and is eating food declared clean and promised by God**
- (3) Elijah is promised to return before the coming of the Lord (Malachi 4:5)**
- (4) and bring repentance (Malachi 4:6)**

OR Brood of vipers, Bearing Fruit, Winnowing Fork, Barns, and Fire

- (1) John calls the unrepentant children of the snake (Gen 3:15)**
- (2) John's imagery is of a fruitful tree that bears good from (Psalm 1:3)**
- (3) Destruction awaits the bad trees, the chaff, the ones that aren't in the way (Psalm 1:4-6)**
- (4) Salvation belongs to those who repent and seek God (Mal 4:2)**

OR Spirit of God, Baptism, Dove

- (1) Spirit of God hovers over creation: Jesus begins God's New Creation (Gen 1:2)**
- (2) God creates from waters of chaos (Gen 1:2, 9)**
- (3) Spirit rests (a new Sabbath) on Jesus (the Lord of the Sabbath) (Gen 2:2)**
- (4) God speaks (Gen 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26,28,29) and is pleased (Gen 1:31)**

Example Passage and Questions 3rd-6th Grade (Student Practice Quiz):

Read this passage (Matthew 3:1-17) and answer the questions:

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