

School District Guidelines For The Use of Bible Stories in The Classroom

We [name of school district] agree with the Supreme Court, which stated, “It might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities.”¹

We recognize that “one of our educational goals is to advance the students’ knowledge and appreciation of the role that our religious heritage has played in the social, cultural, and historical development of civilization.”² Part of our educational responsibility is to foster students’ cultural literacy—to acquaint them with themes, stories, characters, and phrases, which are a part of Western civilization—and to promote good character qualities. Because much of this is found in the Bible, we believe a basic acquaintance with Bible stories is a legitimate academic goal for our school district.

We recognize, however, that including Bible stories in the classroom experience needs to be done objectively, without being devotional or sectarian in its presentation. Therefore, we have adopted the following guidelines:

1. The teacher or authorized guest may read aloud or have the students read the Bible as the primary text for learning the story.
2. The story’s literary value, character lesson, historical context, and contribution to civilization may be explained in an unbiased and objective manner without sectarian indoctrination. For example, being unbiased and objective would mean that instead of saying “God said...” the teacher would say, “In the story, God said...”
3. While the teacher or authorized guest may encourage students to emulate a particular character quality exhibited in a Bible story, he or she may not suggest that it should be emulated because it is a religious mandate.
4. No child shall be required to express religious belief or non-belief in conjunction with the lesson.
5. Parents may opt their children out of these lessons by notifying the teacher. The teacher should supply an alternative character education lesson for these children.

1. *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203,225 (1963).
2. *Florey v. Sioux Falls School District* (8th Cir. 1980).