

Assessment Helps Students More Deeply Connect Their Studies, Their Lives, and a Biblical Perspective

Kim and Michael Essenburg, missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions, serve at Christian Academy in Japan. Here they discuss how Kim's students applied a biblical perspective to their assignment.

Michael: What are you excited about?

Kim: I'm excited that one of my English 10 students wrote, "I have no right to choose

whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

Michael: I can see why you're excited. What were your students studying?

Kim: Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a Holocaust memoir. During their study, they focused on two essential questions: What's wrong with the world? and Who is my neighbor?

At the end of the three-week unit, my students wrote essays. I'm excited that their writing is improving, and I'm excited that they applied a biblical perspective to a theme of *Night*, the mistreatment of others.

Michael: What was the essay prompt?

Kim: My students wrote 750-word essays on the following: How significant a part of what's wrong with the world is the tendency to disregard the human dignity of others, and how should a Christian respond? Illustrate your answer from literature, history, current events, and your own experience. Be sure to address the relevance of the biblical concepts of the image of God and the second greatest commandment.

Michael: That's a challenging essay prompt. How did you prepare your students for it?

Kim: Before they started reading *Night*, my students considered the two essential questions I mentioned earlier, and they discussed "Justice



in an Unjust World,” a five-page article by Gary Haugen, the president of International Justice Mission.

Then as they read *Night*, they discussed racism, discrimination, human dignity, and the basis of human dignity—being created in God’s image. They also increased their awareness of recent events by watching clips from *Hotel Rwanda* and jigsawing four articles:

1. “Being Muslim in a Mad, Sad World”—an article written by Sabaa Saleem and posted in the *Washington Post* on July 31, 2005
 2. “Keep Crying Out; Sudan”—a one-page description of Darfur from a December 2006 edition of the *Economist*
 3. “A Responsibility to Protect: Is Military Intervention the Only Way?”—a two-page article by Rose Marie Berger from the December 2006 edition of *Sojourners*
 4. “Alien Nation”—an article by Isaac Canales that discusses illegal aliens in California from the fall 2007 edition of *Leadership*
- After reading *Night*, my students discussed Wiesel’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, which asserts that the apathy of the victims helps the oppressor. They also worked in groups of four to study Leviticus 19:18, which talks about loving our neighbor, and the seven Bible passages mentioned in the NIV study note. For each of eight passages, they identified the speaker, occasion, audience, and purpose.

Michael: Your students did significant preparation for the essay. Sounds like they learned a lot. What did *you* learn from teaching your *Night* unit?

Kim: Well, I have a deeper appreciation for the power of preparing students for an assessment before, during, and after the study of a literature piece. And I realize that providing students with additional articles

is helpful—last year they discussed two articles and this year they discussed five. The additional articles helped my students get a better understanding of sin and its implications for how people treat each other.

Teaching can be discouraging at times, but reading essays in which students apply a biblical perspective is encouraging! I was encouraged, for example, when I read,

“Our voices can be heard. We just need to speak up loud enough for the world to hear; there are many ways to do this ... not telling racist jokes is how I plan to do my part.”

Writing this essay helped my students more deeply connect their studies, their lives, and a biblical perspective.

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Michael and Kim Essenburg serve at Christian Academy in Japan. Michael Essenburg, MA, works as a coach, a consultant, and a trainer. Kim works as the English department chair, and she teaches English 10. To learn more about assessment, please visit their website at <http://closethegapnow.org/christianed/useassessment/index.html>.