

The Concurrently Companion



Episode 23: Fiction, fake news, and finding perspective

Topic Introduction

News literacy in today's world is hard. One way you can build news literacy in yourself and in your kids or students is by reading broadly. And specifically: by reading *fiction*.

Discussion

To help you in looking back, here are some keywords we used or defined. Define them carefully as a part of your discussion:

fiction, story/narrative, fake news, genre, culture, dystopian fiction, compassion, sympathy, empathy, pathos

Today's C.S. Lewis Quote:

"The man who is contented to be only himself, and therefore less a self, is in prison. My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others. Reality, even seen through the eyes of many, is not enough. I will see what others have invented. . . . [I]n reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do."

These questions follow the thread of our discussion on today's episode of *Concurrently* and may serve as launch points for your conversation at home or in the classroom:

- » Reflect on the quote above. According to Lewis, what types of things does reading fiction do for us as we learn and grow?
- » What is the importance of narrative to human history? (Hint: Look carefully at the word history.)
- » How does fiction help us see ourselves better? How does fiction help us see others better? How does fiction help us have a more global perspective?
- » Why would writers choose to write in genres like historical fiction or science fiction or cross-cultural fiction over narrative non-fiction? What allowances or protections does the genre provide?
- » Jonathan used the idea "standing/walking around in the shoes of another's perspective." What does he mean by that?
- » Debate this idea: Reading (and writing!) fiction helps us understand the news. Support your thoughts (or argue) with ideas from the episode or other outside influences to your thinking.
- » Why might fiction be viewed as dangerous by totalitarian regimes? Who else might view fiction as "dangerous"?
- » How do our values shape our emotions?

- » How does fiction shape how we think, feel, act—even what we value in our core? How do we move from core knowledge and emotions to passionate action?
- » According to the episode, how does the Spirit use fiction as a “mirror” to convict the reader of idols, self-centeredness, etc?
- » How does fiction help us navigate fake news? (Consider the ideas of complexity and two-dimensional caricatures and learning to discern the difference.)

From Jonathan: “Reading fiction...gaining a sense of story structure and character can sometimes help me find...the important through-line of the story. There are all these facts that support it, but which of those facts are giving the gist of the story? From that point, it’s easier to simplify it and make it more digestible for younger readers...when you’re reading something in the news, if you are equipped with a good knowledge of story, that will help you take what you’ve read at the grown-up level and convey it to your kids at a level they can understand, because you’ll have developed that skill of finding the story threads that make it explainable to younger ears.”

Scriptural Anchors/Provision

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. — from James 1:16-25

Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. — Isaiah 54:2-3

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