

## The Lessons of History *by Dr. Laurel Hicks*

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History teachers in Christian schools have a wonderful opportunity to develop character in their students every day of the school year. As they conscientiously use the best methods to teach the facts of history in Christian perspective, they are giving students the chance to develop the traits that can make them great men and women in God’s sense of the term. Dr. Hamilton Wright Mabie, in his introduction to *Our Country in Peace and War* (copyright 1899), points out the character value of the history lesson:

No teaching is so effective as that which flows from persons and characters rather than from abstract principles and statements. Few boys care for patriotism as a quality of character, but every boy knows on the instant what patriotism means when the names of Washington and Lincoln are spoken in his hearing. These great men render through character an even higher service than they render through sacrifice and action. They embody great virtues, they stand for great principles, they illustrate noble qualities. Being dead, they still speak with voices whose range and power are denied to teachers who impart truth but do not live it on a great scale...

History is summed up in great men, and every virtue, every vice, every decisive popular movement is identified with or incarnated in some great man. The name of Washington is the most familiar name for truthfulness and integrity, that of Arnold for baseness and treachery, that of Jefferson for the democratic idea, the rule of the people. These names are always in the air because they have their general and enduring meanings; and no man can estimate their educational value to the country.

Because the Bible is the foundation of the Christian school, Christian history teachers using Christian textbooks have an opportunity that is unique in several ways.

1. ***Christian history teachers can teach with the firm conviction that there are many lessons to be learned from history***—lessons vitally important to both our present and future citizens.
2. ***We can identify the lessons of history and teach them with confidence because of our Biblical perspective. History, the story of what man has done with the time God has given, can only be fully understood in the light of the Bible, which is the story of how God has worked in history.*** A Scriptural understanding of human nature is vital in making evaluations and in teaching the lessons about all periods of history. It is not surprising that the secular historian avoids these evaluations and the accompanying lessons of history. The *A Beka Book* history materials are conscientiously written from a Christian perspective, with the Bible providing the basis for evaluations and for the presentation of the many lessons of history.
3. ***Because of our Biblical perspective, we are able to teach lessons about American political principles***—the ideas and institutions that are not just a “product of historical development” but are *true* because they accord with the universal and absolute truth of God.
4. ***We can without hesitation present political conservatism as the Christian’s proper response to America’s glorious heritage because of our Biblical perspective.*** The Christian teacher should teach the Scriptural principles upon which America was founded and instill within the students the desire and the intelligence to remain true to those principles which establish

political and religious freedom through republican self-government and separation of church and state. Only as our citizens understand these principles and order their lives in light of them can we continue to progress as a people and retain our religious and political freedoms. Only as we teach the freedom and dignity of the individual under God can we produce responsible citizens who can be a just authority for future generations.

5. ***The entire history class can be a lesson in patriotism and Biblical character training.*** Martin Luther, the great Protestant reformer, wrote that if children were taught history in the right way they would be able to comprehend, as a mirror, the character, life, counsels, undertakings, successes, and failures of the whole world from the beginning. From this knowledge they could regulate their views and order their course of life in the fear of God, having become wise in judging what is to be sought and what avoided in this outward life and capable of advising and directing others.

Benjamin Franklin in his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (sic), 1749, wrote that besides teaching geography, the succession of events, and ancient religious and civil customs, a rightly taught history lesson can train children in morality, Christianity, and civil responsibility:

[it trains children in] morality, by descanting and making continual observations on the causes of the rise or fall of any man's character, fortune, power, etc. mentioned in history [and by showing] the advantages of temperance, order, frugality, industry, perseverance, etc. Indeed, the general natural tendency of reading good history must be to fix in the minds of youth deep impressions of the beauty and usefulness of virtue of all kinds, public spirit, fortitude, etc...

History will also afford frequent opportunities of showing... the advantage of a religious character among private persons, the mischiefs of superstition, etc., and the excellency of the Christian religion above all others ancient or modern.

History will also give occasion to expatiate on the advantage of civil orders and constitutions; how men and their properties are protected by joining in societies and establishing government; their industry encouraged and rewarded, arts invented, and life made more comfortable: the advantages of liberty, mischiefs of licentiousness, benefits arising from good laws, and a due execution of justice, etc. Thus may the first principles of sound politics be fixed in the minds of youth.

6. ***So that the lessons of history can be indelibly written upon the students' minds, the Christian history teacher will want to use the very best teaching methods.*** The study aids in the *A Beka Book* history books have been carefully designed to provide proper overview and effective review, the narrative is presented in a readable, interesting style, and the illustrations are intended to enhance understanding and appreciation of the text. *The A Beka Book* curriculums have been laid out to free the teacher to daily use the most interesting and workable teaching methods. An effective pattern to follow for teaching a daily lesson follows:

- a. Have the students read the material silently for homework, during study hall, or at the beginning of the class period. They should begin with the questions at the head of the chapter.
- b. Drill the geography and document memorization material that the students are working on, and drill important names, dates, events, lessons, and principles from past lessons.

- c. Ask questions over the assigned reading.
- d. Present the lesson as a story, the way you would tell a Bible story or a classical children's story. Ask questions at appropriate times. Keep a sense of wonder and excitement in your voice, and present the applications as they naturally flow from the history. Use the story as it is written in the book as your guide. You may want to have the students open their books from time to time so you can point out appropriate maps and illustrations to them.
- e. Review your presentation by asking the chapter questions again. Sometimes you can select students to narrate to the class short passages from the lesson, and other times you will want to give a written quiz over the lesson.

This pattern will vary according to grade level, and will be punctuated by student reports, audio-visual presentations, and a variety of other techniques.

Moses Coit Tyler, a history teacher of a past generation, has said, "*History is the great teacher of human nature by means of object lessons drawn from the whole recorded life of human nature.*" Teachers have the obligation and privilege to present those object lessons daily to students who will be tomorrow's citizens and, undoubtedly, tomorrow's religious and civil leaders. Teach the lessons well. Present them as a story, and review faithfully from day to day the carefully chosen facts, dates, principles, and events of history as well as the meaning of the facts, dates, principles, and events from the perspective of God's Word. In this way your students will be able to benefit throughout their lives from the lessons of history.

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**Dr. Laurel Hicks**

*Beginning in 1972 as A Beka Book's first writer and editor, Dr. Laurel Hicks was key in the development of A Beka Book. She managed the growing editorial staff for 25 years.*

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