

ATCRE: CPD

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Teaching Scripture for meaning not recall: a Hermeneutical Pedagogy.

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This session...

1. What is the problem?
2. What is the call?
3. How could a hermeneutical reading of Scripture be achieved?

1983: Europe

Jean Holm: Passages were 'detached from their context and no account [was] taken of the nature of the literature, the period when it was written, the purpose it originally served, or the way in which it [was] now interpreted in the religious community'.

Luis Erdozain likened the use of Scripture in thematic units to parachuting. Passages arrived with little warning, often 'to the astonishment and shock of those present'.



What is the problem here?

1990s: Australia

- Deborah Madgen (1993) found that the placement of Scripture within religious education units with named and defined themes immediately predetermined how students would understand the Scripture cited.
- Barbara Stead (1994) concluded her examination of the teaching of the Bible within primary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne, determining that programmes that were thematically based were inherently problematic.
- Carswell (1995) *Educating into Discipleship* found that the Guidelines for RE (Archdiocese of Melbourne) ignored biblical scholarship in the placement of passages
- Michael Grace (2003) examined the secondary setting to claim that the thematic, proof-texting of Scripture he found prevalent in Catholic Secondary Schools, was likely to lead a literalist, fundamentalist understanding of passages.
- Carswell (2006) *Biblical Metaphors for God in primary level of the Educational series 'To Know Worship and Love'* found that the presentation of biblical metaphors for God was likely to lead students to developing a limited, distorted perception of the very nature of God.

- It's all about priorities

Curriculum writers,
focused on
communicating the
predetermined content
of the unit relegate
Scripture to a secondary,
supportive, role.

TOP PRIORITIES

1. content
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

- As a result, the insights of critical biblical study can be, and are, completely ignored. Scripture passages are chosen with little thought for their background, their literary form and their nature as documents of faith.

TOP PRIORITIES

1. content
2. outcomes
3.
4.
5.

- Links between the material being taught and the selection of Scripture could be as insignificant as word association.
- Instead of being respectful of Scripture in its own right, such tendentious use exploits it for the users own preset, narrow purposes only.

TOP PRIORITIES

1. content
2. outcomes
3. t/l activities
4.
5.

- Passages deemed to support the predefined view are chosen with little or no consideration of the contexts from which they come.

TOP PRIORITIES

1. content

2. outcomes

3. t/l activities

4. resources

5.

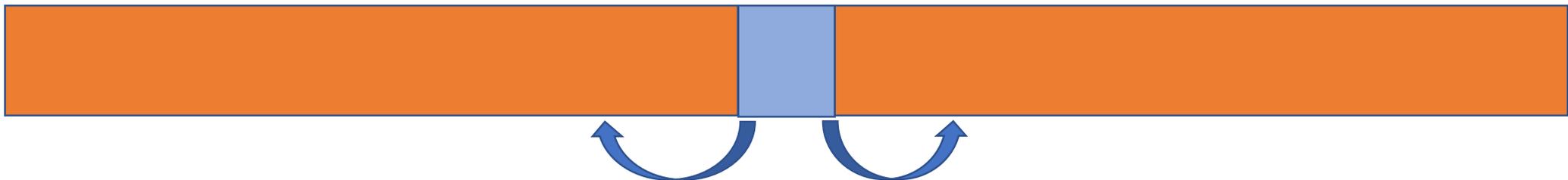
- The *PBC* call the practice of using Scripture to promote or support a predefined point of view coming to a passage with an *a priori* intent (1993, 117).
- It is discounted as a valid reading of Scripture

TOP PRIORITIES

1. content
2. outcomes
3. t/l activities
4. resources
5. What scripture can we use?

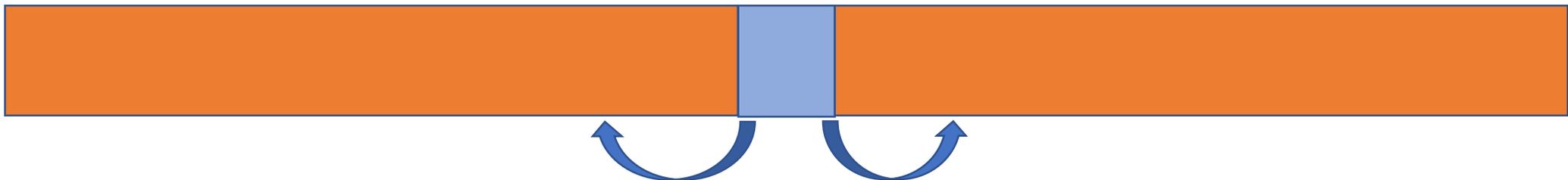
The result: for Scripture

- When the role of scripture is limited to that of supporting, validating or 'proving' a theme idea or concept, a number of best practices become redundant.
 - 'knowledge' about passages is irrelevant (historical, geographical religious, political etc)
 - Passages are fragmented and amalgamated
 - Adaptations are poor: written to make the unit point
 - 'serial stories' – Multiple passages strung together
 - Author/audience setting, literary form, literary techniques are ignored



The result: for pupils

- When the role of scripture is limited to that of supporting, validating or 'proving' a theme idea or concept, a number of best practices *in education* become redundant.
 - They learn nothing about Scripture itself
 - They learn that authentic presentation does not matter
 - They learn that meaning is defined, given to them by others
 - They learn that thinking is not required and they disengage with Scripture



- *Real, informed* engagement with Scripture is denied: when placed within a predefined topic or theme, Scripture fulfills its role simply by validating what the curriculum writers intended it to validate.
- ‘Like wardens standing at crossroads directing the on coming traffic, the unit theme; with its predefined outcomes, intentions, success criteria, resources, activities, teacher background reading and even title, point to how passages are to be understood.’



What is the call?

- Don't just use, don't just read it, don't just even analyse it, **interpret it.**

Dictionary

Search for a word

hermeneutics

/,hə:'mi'nju:tiks/ 

noun

the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or literary texts.

Translations, word origin and more definitions

[Feedback](#)

Hermeneutics - Wikipedia

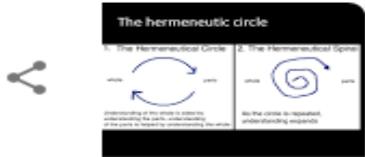
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermeneutics>

Hermeneutics (*/,hɜːrmə'njuːtiks/*) is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts. ... **Hermeneutic**, as a count noun in the singular, refers to some particular method of interpretation (see, in contrast, double hermeneutic).

[Biblical hermeneutics](#) · [History of hermeneutics](#) · [Double hermeneutic](#)

Hermeneutics

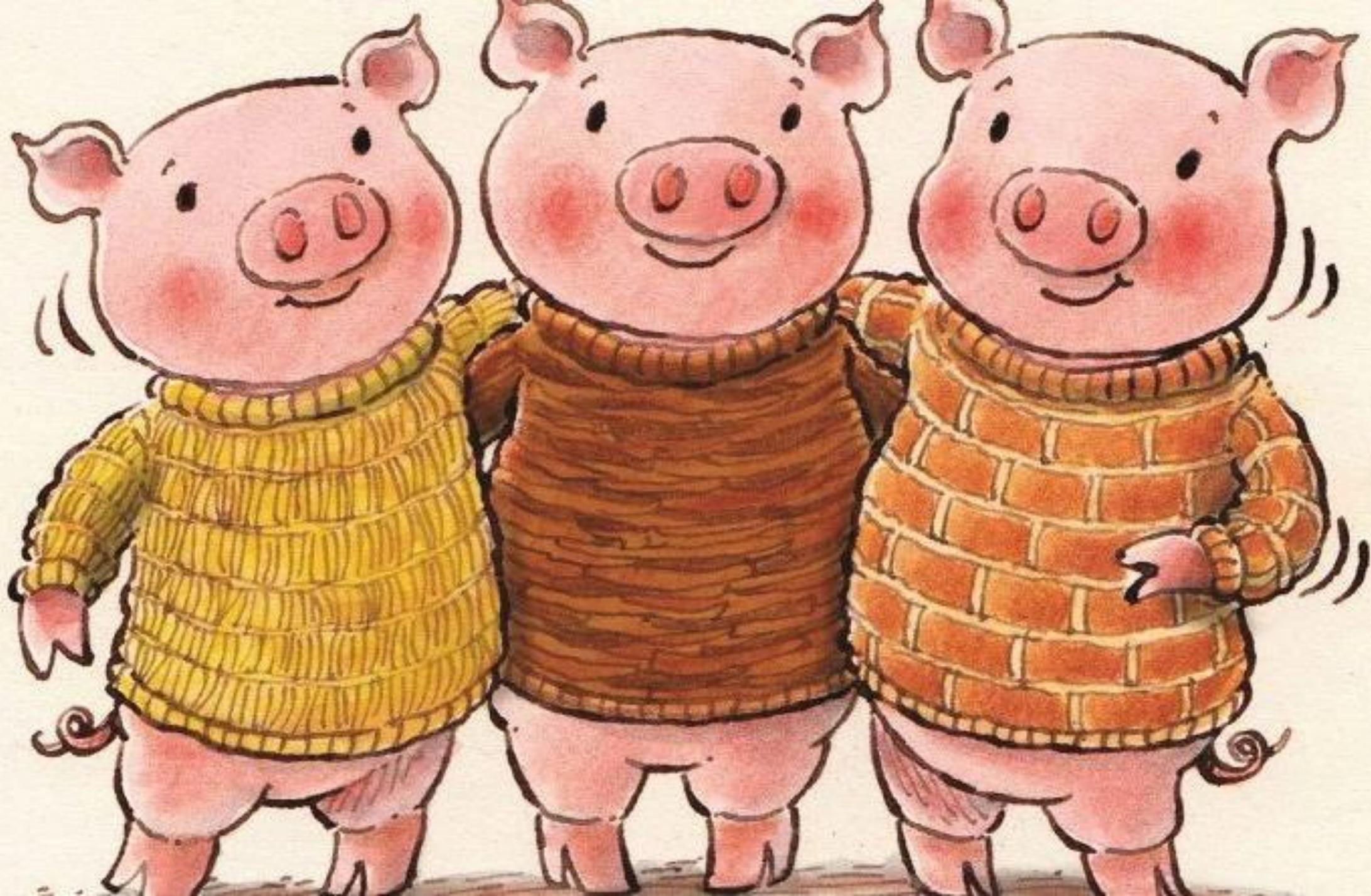
Applied discipline



Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts. Modern hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as semiotics, presuppositions, and pre-understandings. [Wikipedia](#)

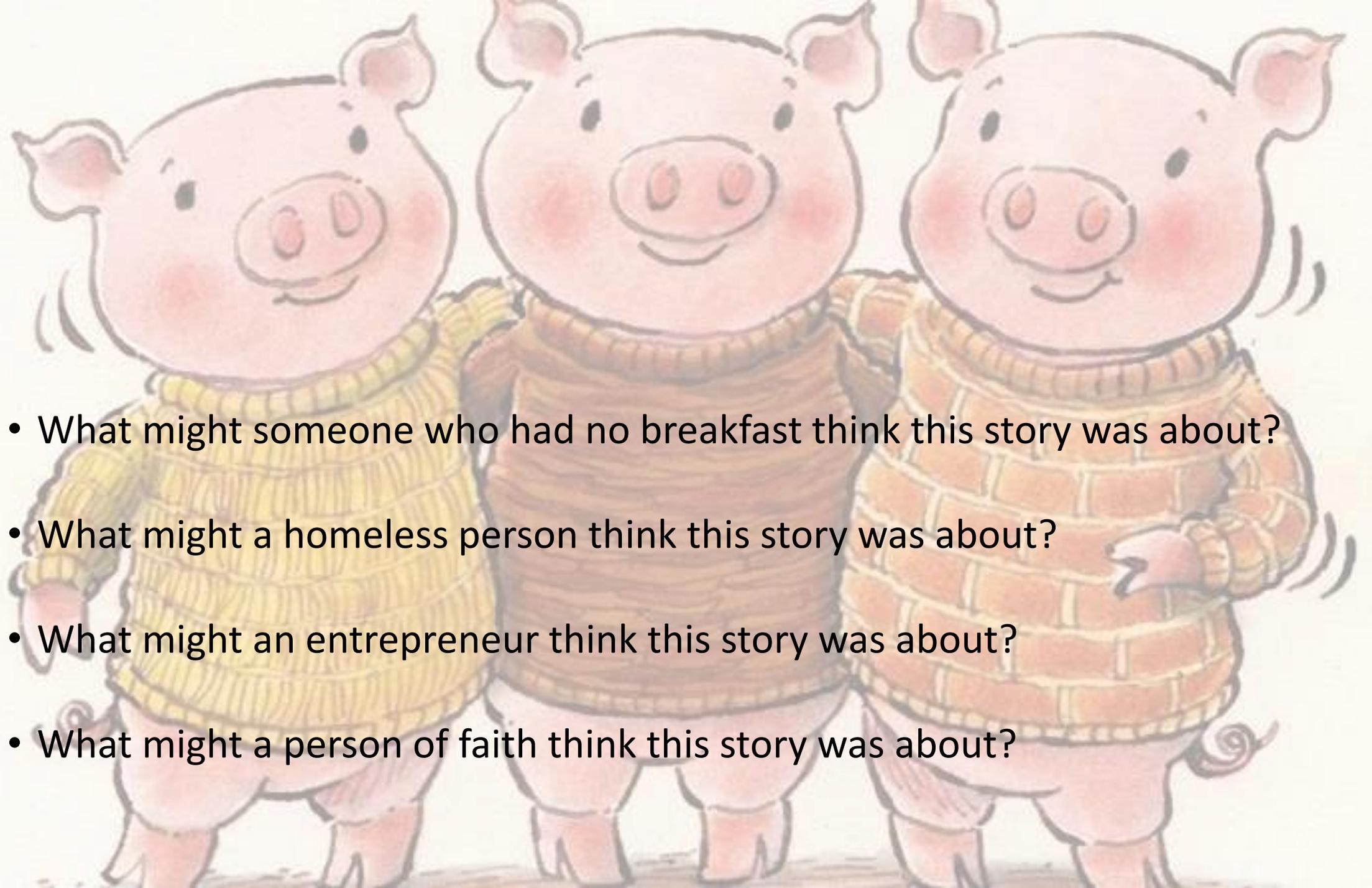
[Feedback](#)

• How does this story go?





- What is this story really about?



- What might someone who had no breakfast think this story was about?
- What might a homeless person think this story was about?
- What might an entrepreneur think this story was about?
- What might a person of faith think this story was about?

What is the call?

- Thus the methods of literary and historical analysis are necessary for interpretation. Yet the meaning of a text can be fully grasped only as it is actualized in the lives of readers who appropriate it. Beginning with their situation, they are summoned to uncover new meanings, along the fundamental line of meaning indicated by the text. Biblical knowledge should not stop short at language, it must seek to arrive at the reality of which the language speaks. The religious language of the Bible is a symbolic language which "gives rise to thought" (*donne a penser*), a language the full richness of which one never ceases to discover, a language which points to a transcendent reality and which, at the same time, awakens human beings to the deepest dimensions of personal existence.

Literal and spiritual senses

- It is not only legitimate, it is also absolutely necessary to seek to define the precise meaning of texts as produced by their authors-- what is called the "literal" [but not literalist] meaning. (IBC)
- As a general rule we can define the spiritual sense, as understood by Christian faith, as the meaning expressed by the biblical texts when read under the influence of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the paschal mystery of Christ and of the new life which flows from it.

- ‘One of the problems we face today, not only in religion, is illiteracy: the hermeneutic skills that make us credible interpreters and translators of our own cultural tradition are in short supply.’ Pope Francis (2020) *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus*

Q. How could a hermeneutical reading of Scripture be achieved?

A. Some ‘repositioned thinking’ and the introduction of some explicit skills.

reposition our thinking

1. The Bible is a message wrapped in words. Our task is to study the 'wrapping' and unlock a message

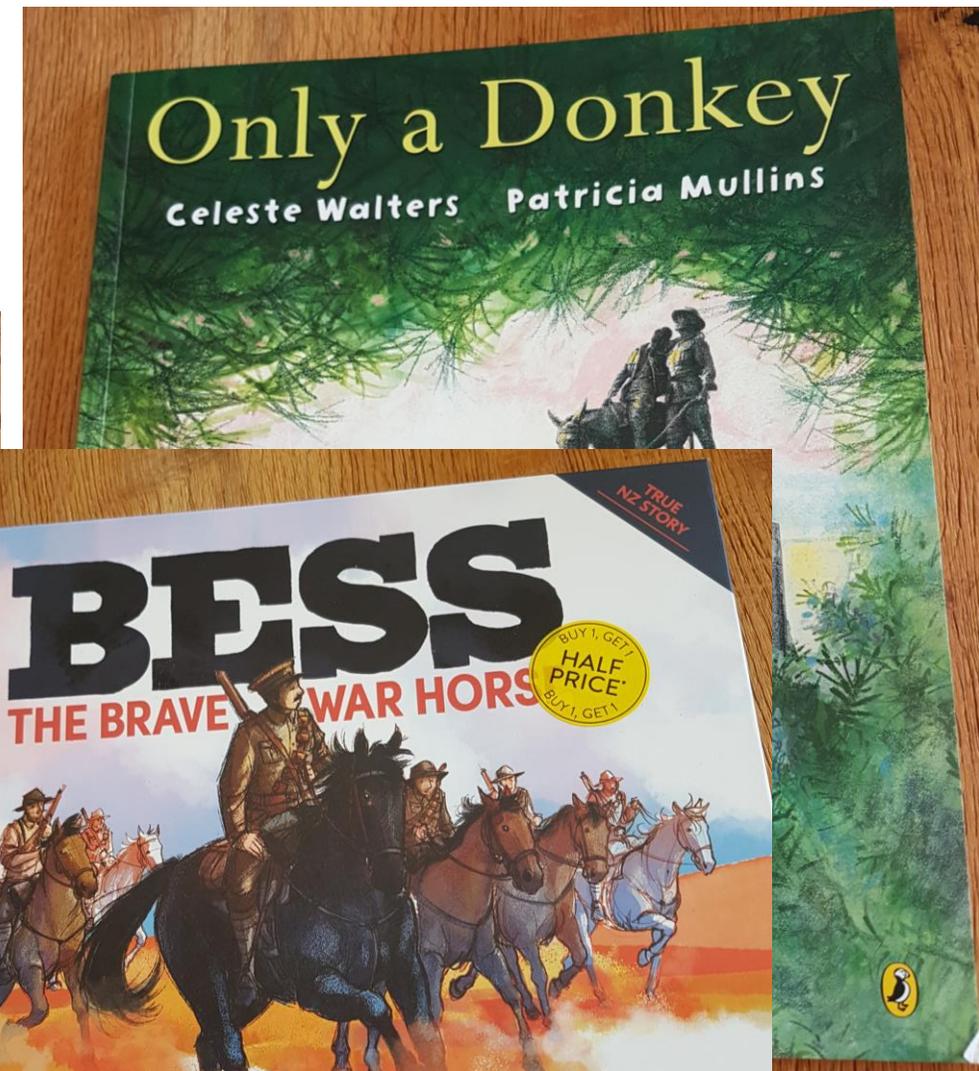
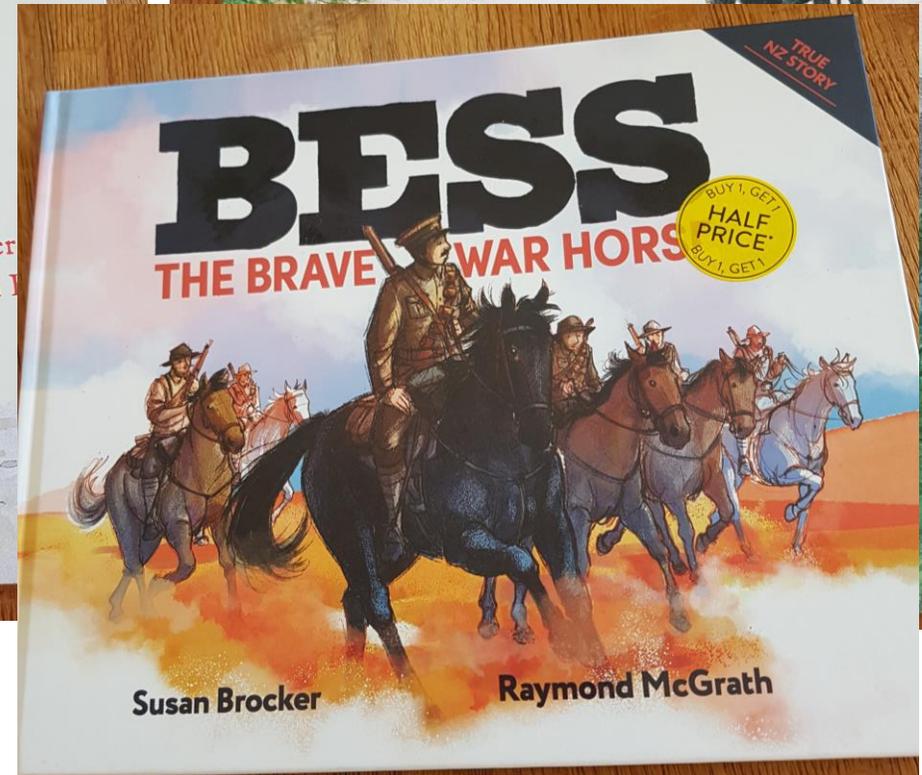
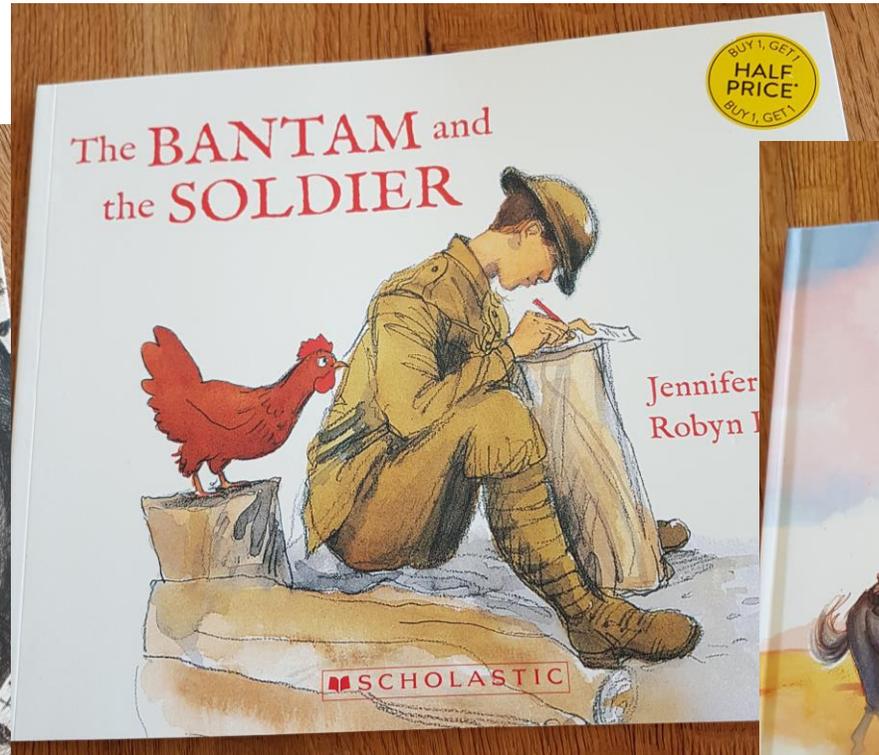
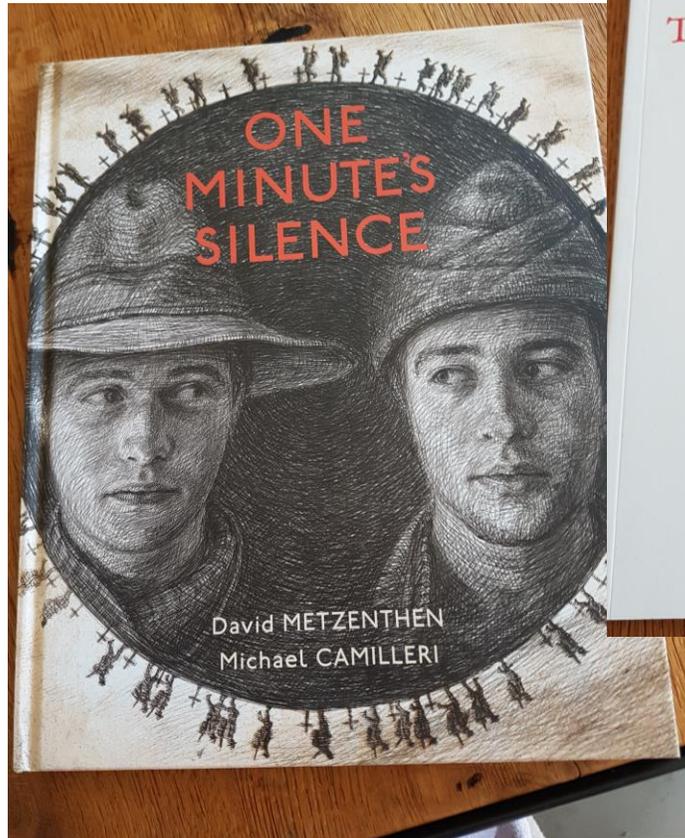


Retelling (remembering) is not interpretation



reposition our thinking
2. Think and speak better about truth
Befriend the hermeneutical gap

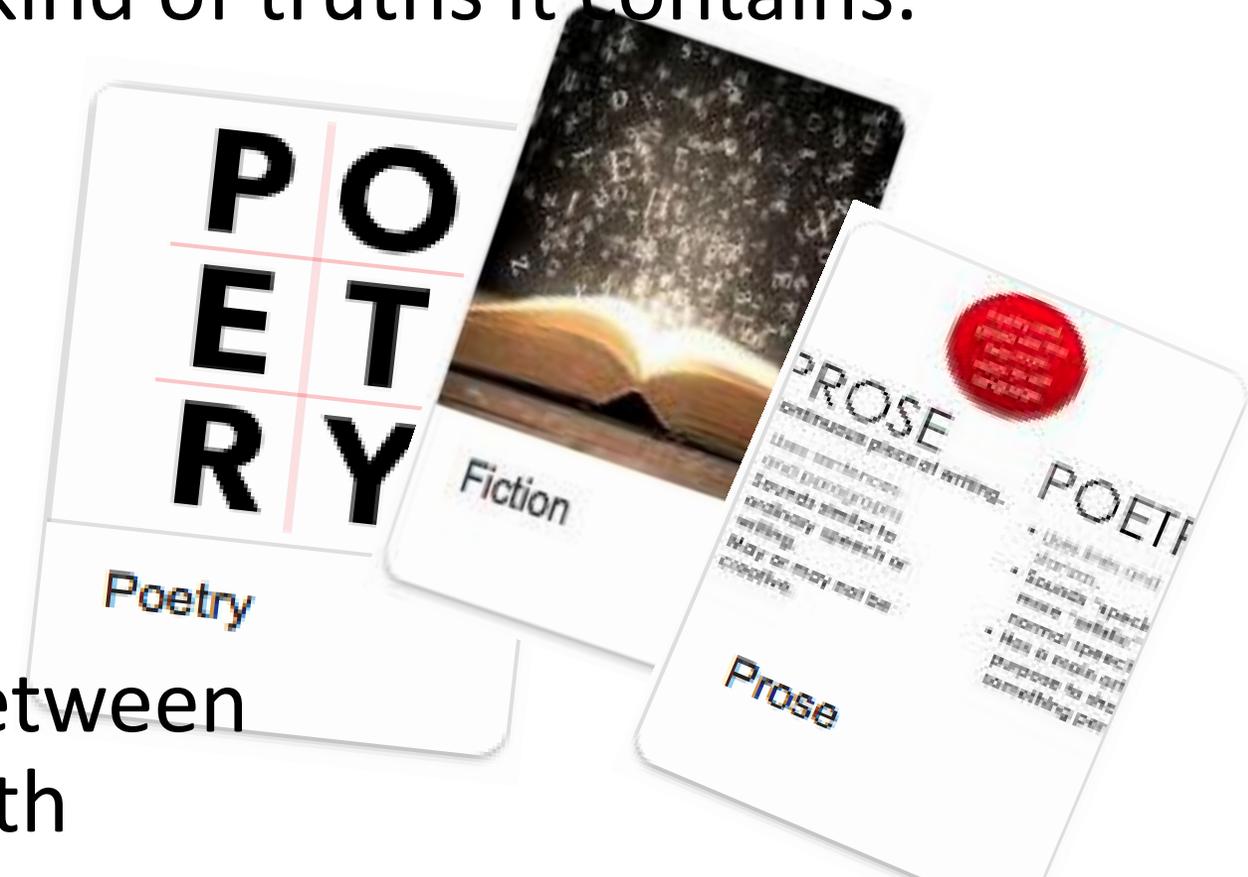
reposition our thinking
Think and speak better about truth
Befriend the hermeneutical gap



'distance' changes understanding

reposition our thinking

3. Value Literary form. Noting the literary form of a piece of writing demands immediate consciousness that we pay attention to the kind of truths it contains.



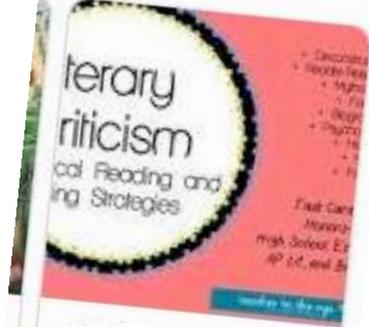
Make clear the relationship between literary form, purpose and truth



Fairy tale



Epic



Literary criticism



Encyclopedia

P
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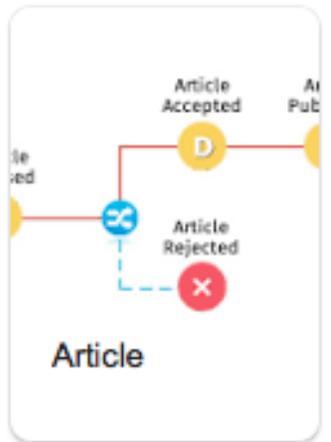
Poetry



Fiction



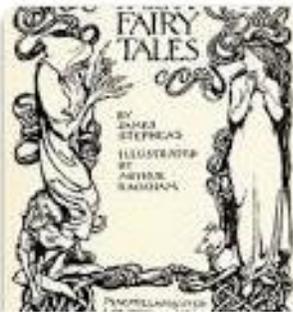
Prose



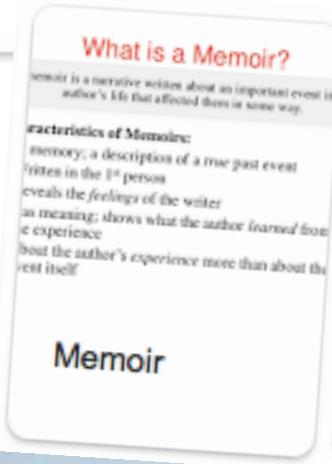
Article



Historical drama



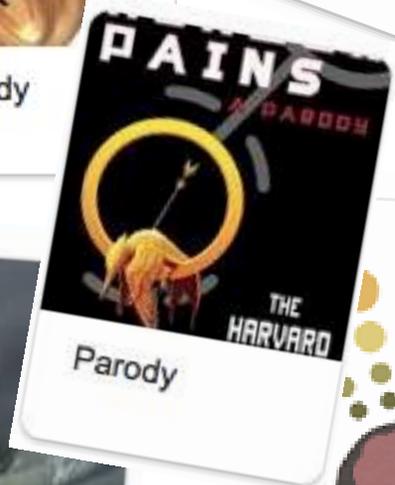
Folklore



Memoir



Tragedy



Parody



Picaresque Fiction



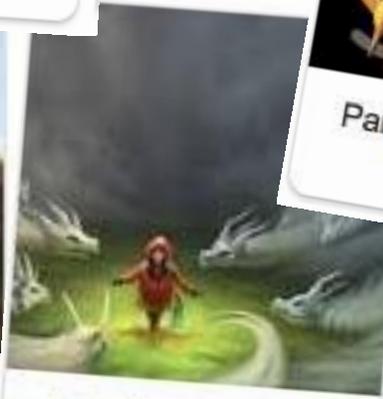
Science Fiction



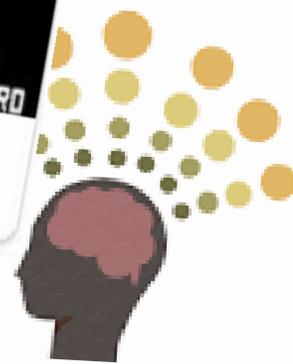
Comedy



Pastoral



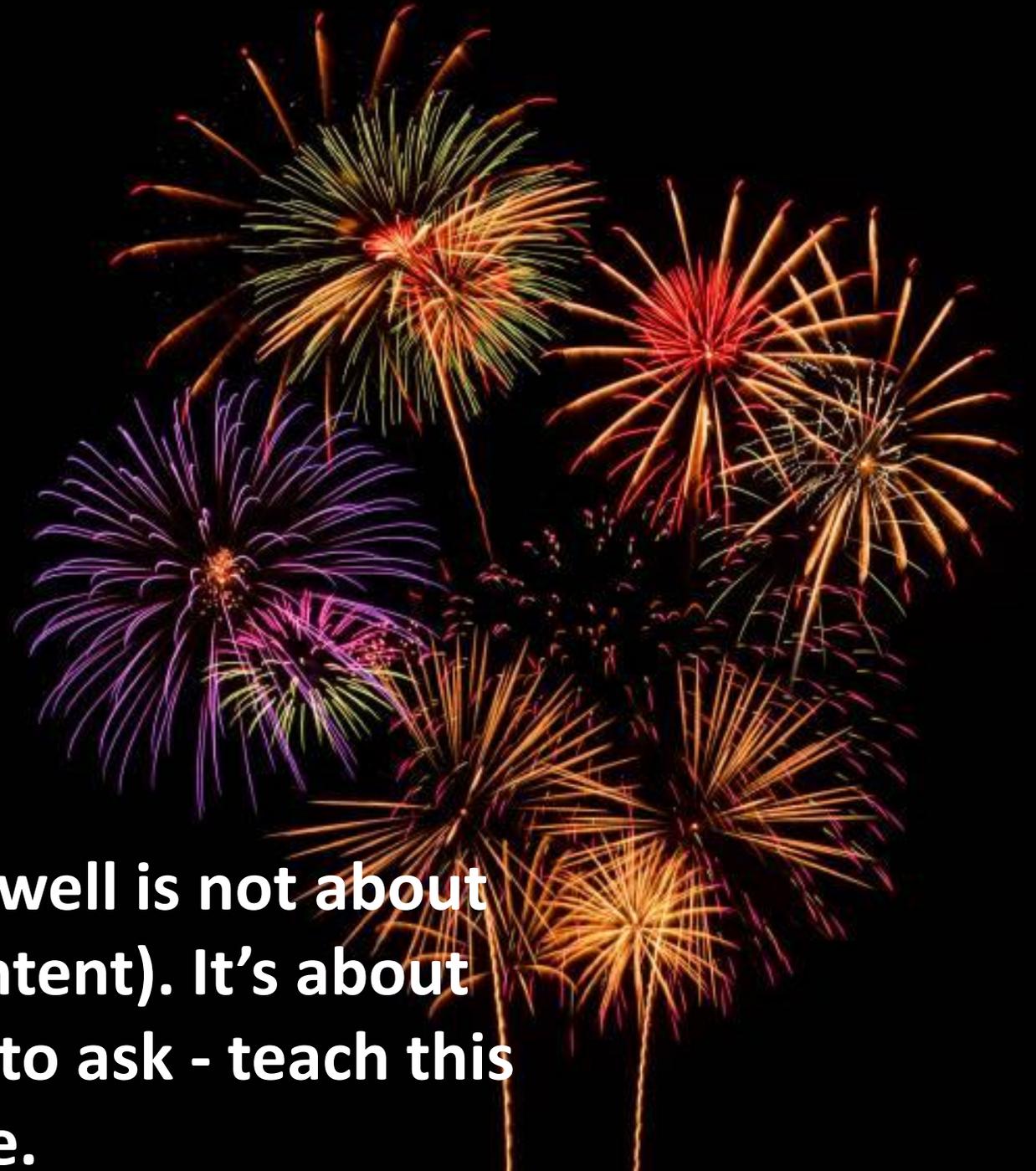
Fantasy



Philosophy

Reposition our thinking

4. Be confident that doing it well is not about knowing all the answers (content). It's about knowing the right questions to ask - teach this skill and then insist on its use.



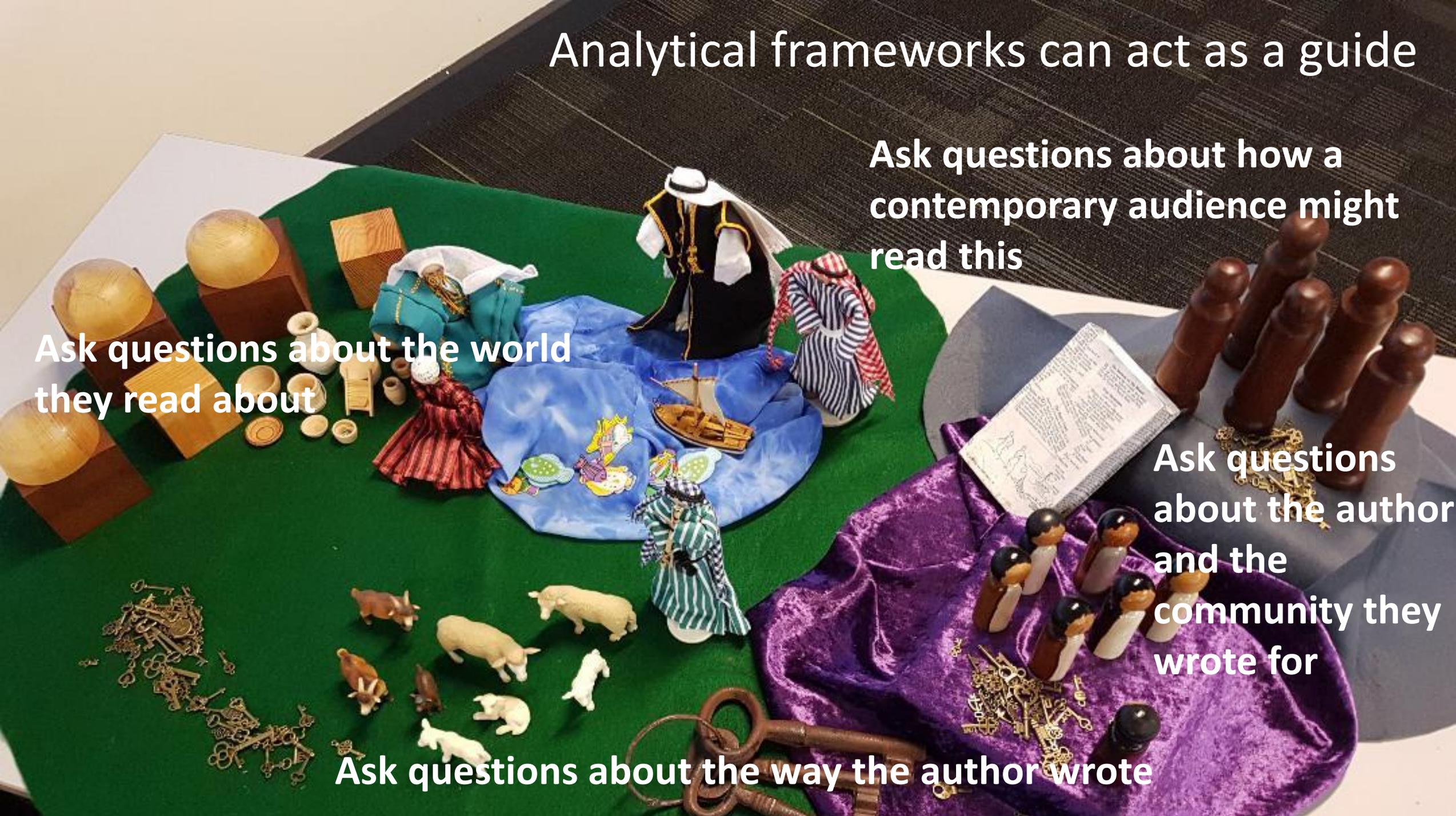
Analytical frameworks can act as a guide

Ask questions about how a contemporary audience might read this

Ask questions about the world they read about

Ask questions about the author and the community they wrote for

Ask questions about the way the author wrote



reposition our thinking

Analytical frameworks can act as a guide

- ***An author wrote about something (people and places, practices, beliefs and events) using words***
- Red lens unwraps the world the author wrote about and the way they used words to convey their message



They wrote about	using words
characters	literary form
places	Structure purpose (truths)
cultural/ Religious events, practices, beliefs	contrast dialogue repetition
ONSTAGE	figurative language
REDLENS	contributing to a whole

reposition our thinking

Analytical frameworks can act as a guide

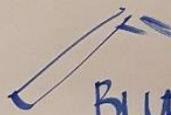
Lenses and Keys

They wrote

for a particular group of people at a particular time to address a particular issue

- Blue lens unwraps the world of the author and their community



Someone wrote:	For someone
Name	Gentile/Jew
We think...	Asking a question
From (place)	Experiencing-
Date (when)	
<div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px;">verbs recognise identify describe explain</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center;">BACKSTAGE  BLUE LENS</div>

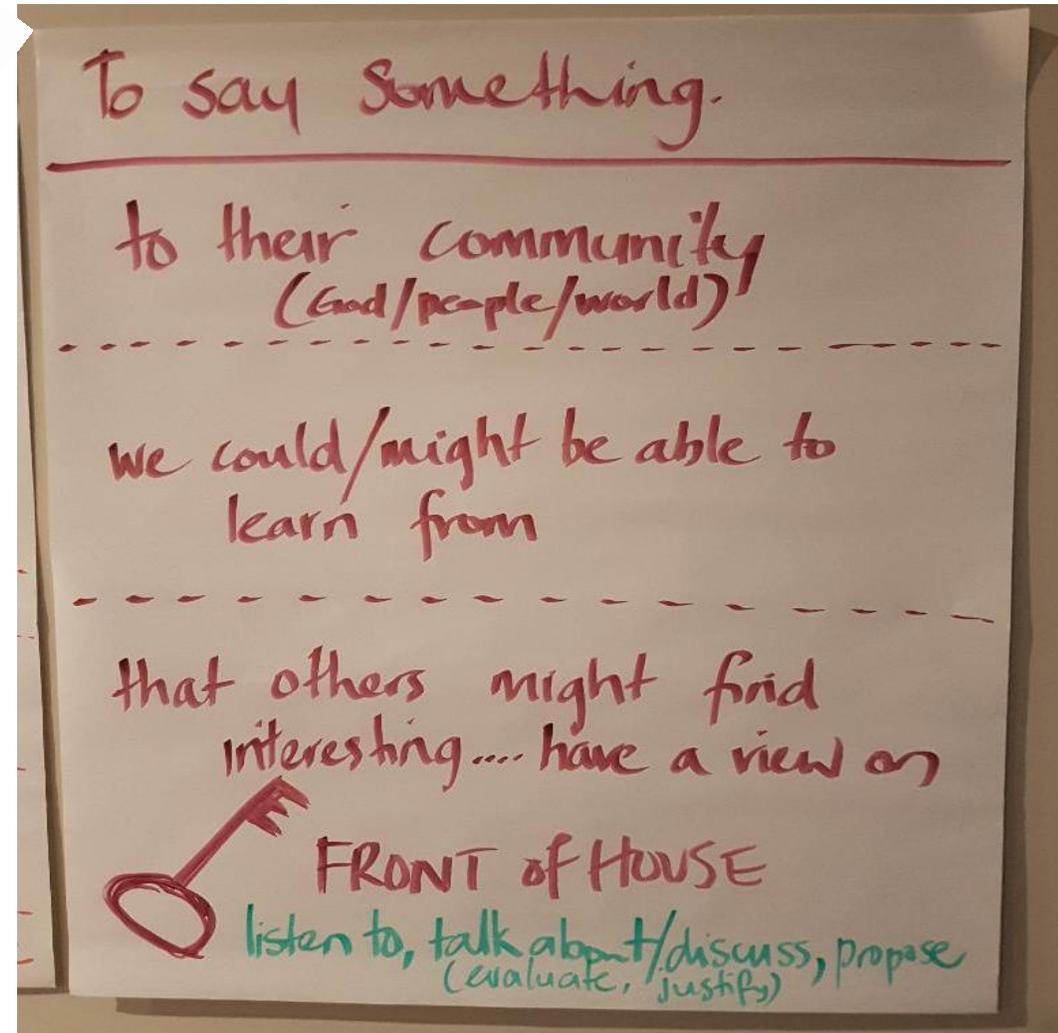
reposition our thinking

Analytical frameworks can act as a guide

Keys

They wrote to say something

- Purple key is what we think the author...
 - was trying to say to their community
 - could still be saying to me/us now



Reposition our thinking

Analytical frameworks can act as a guide

'LAaSMO'

Literary form and features

Author and audience

Setting

Meaning

2 layers (original audience, us)

Other



Use LAaSMO to analyse the following passage from Luke's Gospel.

Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV): The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

L	Literary Form What genre or literary form has the author used? What sort of truths does this form convey?	The chapter starts off as a lawyer testing Jesus, but soon changes to a parable, which is a story metaphorical story th about a topic that has a deep meaning that teaches people about ways of life and how to act like a good person.
Aa	Author & Audience Who wrote this? Who did they write it for? What was happening at the time? What was life like?	This gospel story is written down by Luke who obtained his story from Paul, a disciple of Jesus and from the gospel of Mark. Luke was writing to gentiles so he replaced Jewish terms like Rabbi (found in other gospels) and to lawyers, a more universal term. Luke was trying to teach people to be compassionate and caring.
S	Setting What is the world that this passage is set in? What places, roles, people and customs are mentioned?	This is set in first century Palestine on a dangerous road. In this story, the Samaritan is the 'hero'. Jesus chose the Samaritan because the Samaritans were hated by Levites and Jesus was trying to say that your enemy can be the one making the right choice. Also a priest, ignored the man. This could show that even a priest, whose job it is to follow God isn't always right and just.
M	Meaning What do you think the author was trying to say to their community: About God? About people? The world?	Luke was trying to educate people on how to be compassionate and caring. "Go and do likewise" was the whole chapter summarised in one sentence. That was the sentence with Luke was saying directly on how to act.
O	Our World Today What do others, people of faith and people of no faith, think of this passage.	Today this story could be of a school bully in the playground helping someone hurt. This story still is about people helping others in need and shows just how a human should act to be a good person.

Make interpretation a goal

Reposition our
thinking

5. Expect interpretation as an outcome of teaching: *Students will draw on their knowledge of Luke, his community and study of 'N' to wonder about, talk about (discuss) or suggest what he might have been trying to convey to his original audience...AND could still be saying to us, now.*



Implications... where are you?

- The Five key learnings
 - Differentiate retelling from interpretation
 - Speak better about the hermeneutical gap and truth
 - Identify literary form and purpose
 - Use an analytical framework
 - Make interpretation a goal (outcome)
- The Analytical frameworks
 - Lenses
 - LAaSMO
- What do you recognize as your need?
- What small steps could you add to current practice:
 - Immediately?
 - Soon?
 - Longer term?
- What support would you or your staff need?

Conclusions

- Poor Curriculum design:
 - The way that we write curriculum and present in RE is largely responsible for this problem. We have used scripture to validate or prove themes: we have proof texted. *A Priori* consideration – an approach contrary to Catholic Biblical scholarship
 - Acknowledgement of the nature, history, literary form or features of the passage is, therefore, not required...waste of time. The theme acts as a kind of guard or boundary into which Scripture is placed.
 - What passages mean is defined by the theme, often alluded to in its title. This presentation can not be considered hermeneutical.

Conclusions

- Limit study of passages in each unit of work
 - In number
 - In authorship
 - Authors – use the Gospel of the year
- Teach students to expect to interpret passages: expect some expression of meaning as an outcome
 - Talk about, discuss, propose, justify, evaluate
- Think about the delivery of passages: telling is a better entry point than reading....BUT integrity to author is always the criteria of telling.

Conclusions

- Carry over strategies from 'ordinary' literacy (begin there)
 - Literary form
 - Interpretation
- Remember: recall is about remembering; interpretation is about meaning.
- Build up student knowledge: settings, rituals, events; authors and their communities; geography, timelines. Start with a map in every class
- Develop and use a set of skills which 'grow' biblical competence:
 - Model; Teach; Allow

Walk slowly.

- We need to know more, always.
- Using an analytical framework helps embed the right questions. It doesn't give you the answers though OR ensure you apply them to the achieve the end product!

Saint Jerome's impassioned love for the divine Scriptures was steeped in obedience. First, to God who revealed himself in words that demand a reverent hearing, and, then to those in the Church who represent the living Tradition that interprets the revealed message. The "obedience of faith" (*Rom* 1:5; 16:26) is not, however, a mere passive reception of something already known; on the contrary it demands an active personal effort to understand what was spoken. We can think of Saint Jerome as a "servant" of the word, faithful and industrious, entirely devoted to fostering in his brothers and sisters in faith a more adequate understanding of the sacred "deposit" entrusted to them (cf. *1 Tim* 6:20; *2 Tim* 1:14). Without an understanding of what was written by the inspired authors, the word of God itself is deprived of its efficacy (cf. *Mt* 13:19) and love for God cannot spring up.

Jerome can serve as our guide because, like Philip (cf. *Acts* 8:35), he leads every reader to the mystery of Jesus, while responsibly and systematically providing the exegetical and cultural information needed for a correct and fruitful reading of the Scriptures.

Pope Francis: *Scripturae Sacrae Affectus* (Devotion to Sacred Scripture)