

What is the RealityBites Story Course?

The RealityBites Story Course was developed as a resource for youth leaders, teachers and schoolworkers to help them unmask worldviews and hidden agendas in popular culture.

This package will equip you with about fifty worldview stories under twenty themes, designed for use with young people, students or a church congregation. Some of the stories are about inspiring, culture-transforming Christians. Others concern mad, eccentric people who have wasted their lives because of their idolatries and obsessions. In addition, you will find entertaining stories taken from films, television programmes, newspapers and adverts. There are longer stories and vignettes: two-minute attention-grabbers and sit-down yarns. The course also includes role-plays, video clips, meditations, prayers, Bible studies and suggestions for heated debate!

Before we launch into twenty sample stories, let's explore what we mean by a 'worldview'. Worldviews are best understood as the dreams that drive our lives. Consider the 10 million pound challenge. How would you live if you had this vast fortune? Many people's dreams today are consumerist. Consumerists have horizons of happiness and horizons of possibility which reject biblical teaching. Some consumerists become idle loafers and some become workaholics. We can put our finger on consumerism and secularism by introducing the five worldview questions:

- (1) ***Where am I?*** What is the nature of the world and universe I live in?
- (2) ***Who am I?*** What is the nature, task and purpose of human beings?
- (3) ***What's wrong?*** What is the basic obstacle that keeps me from finding fulfillment? In other words, how do I understand evil?
- (4) ***What's the solution?*** How is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? In other words, how do I find salvation?
- (5) ***What happens to me after death?*** Will I rot in the ground (for example), or will I be waiting for the resurrection of my body?

Getting young people to understand these five big questions gives them a powerful tool. We will stress that stories are a great way to introduce worldviews. Furthermore, it is vital to understand that most of these stories are not embarrassing or threatening. Many 'secular' people today (young or old) find it difficult to talk about God, faith, prayer and 'religious' things. This course gets around that obstacle. We tell exciting, dramatic stories which stimulate people to think about both Christian and non-Christian worldviews. This is the great advantage of telling stories and exploring worldviews. Leaders must select the stories that seem most appropriate for their groups. The stories about Hetty Green, Gordon Bennett, Beau Brummell, Imelda Marcos, William Sleeman and John Portsmouth Football Club Westwood are perfect if the group is embarrassed by 'religion'.

The twenty story themes

- 1. Canadian Caribou.** This is a heartwarming story about revival and the unexpected return of caribou to an Inuit community in Canada. God is at work through His Son forgiving, restoring and reconciling all things (Col 1:15-19). We also mention other stories which include leopards, horses, cats and God's kingdom breaking in. We will focus on six relationships that sin and idolatry break.
- 2. George Cadbury.** A story about the great chocolatier who brought celebration, mercy and the Sabbath into his chocolate factory. Sometimes George would tell his employees to stop working and everyone would enjoy a cracking game of cricket on company time. How does the George Cadbury story help us to understand the gospel of the Kingdom?
- 3. Hetty Green.** A story about a very mean multi-millionaire. All people are incurably religious, and we become like the gods we worship (Psalm 115). How did Hetty Green answer the five worldview questions? Her answer is profoundly secular, and there is a hidden depth to this worldview that needs to be unpacked. Social materialism (obsession with material things) flows from philosophical materialism (only matter and energy really exist). By way of contrast we explore the life of Angela Burdett-Coutts who lavished her wealth on Kingdom projects.
- 4. George Müller.** A story about an inspiring Christian who adopted thousands of orphans. God is the living God and He responds to prayer when we seek first His kingdom. We explore the secular worldview of the people who hated Muller. How did nasty factory owners answer the five worldview questions? The dominant western religion puts faith in human power,

- ingenuity and autonomy. We tell the story of a modern day Müller – a Ugandan man who has received many answers to prayer for his orphanage.
5. **Amy Carmichael.** A story about a missionary who rescued thousands of children from prostitution in India. What is the caste system? We explore how a servant of the goddess Yellama would answer the worldview questions. This story helps us to understand the biblical theme of Exodus.
 6. **Gordon Bennett.** An amusing story about an eccentric millionaire who was always bored. This helps us understand more about autonomy and the master slave issue. For many secular celebrities there is a hidden caste system: I am a god and you are my slave. Why do we admire celebrities? Do we think celebrities are constantly making the most of their autonomy, escaping from work, sorrows and responsibilities? We also tell the story of shopaholic Imelda Marcos, who bought incredible numbers of shoes, handbags and designer gowns – and stole billions from the Philippines treasury.
 7. **John Anthony Portsmouth Football Club Westwood.** A story about a football fanatic who worships ‘Pompey’. Idolatry can take both a secular and a pagan form. We look at Christian footballers who reject this idolatry, with brief vignettes about Kaka, Lomana LuaLua and Damiano Tommassi. Many western people (in particular men) are prone to this form of idolatry. Idolatry always makes us less than human. Jesus has come to restore our full humanity. This includes a healthy enjoyment of sport.
 8. **Shay Cullen.** A story about a Roman Catholic priest who rescues children from the sex slave trade in the Philippines. We will focus on corruption and bribery and the need for Christians to be engaged with all spheres of life. Where are the godly police officers, magistrates, lawyers and government officials? How might sex tourists answer the worldview questions?
 9. **William Sleeman.** A story about a Cornishman who served God as a detective. This is a great introduction to the clash of three worldviews – Thuggee, Christianity and Consumerism. This story illustrates how we can serve God in so-called ‘secular’ areas. God rescued Sleeman from thug attacks on three occasions.
 10. **William Carey.** This amazing missionary brought cultural transformation to India. Signposts of the kingdom should always accompany the preaching of the Gospel, and Carey’s love of botany, astronomy and poetry gives us a new template for mission. His work shows how Biblical salvation is not God’s rescue of individual souls *from* the world, but of the whole created world. Authentic mission comes when all of life is being redeemed – mere

proselytising can be an embarrassing, painful burden. Carey's work shows a much richer perspective on the gospel, and many Hindus were deeply impressed by his cultural achievements. The gospel is the announcement that Jesus Christ, the Crucified One, is the resurrected King of kings.

- 11. Beau Brummell.** This is a fascinating story about a dandy who was obsessed by his necktie and personal appearance. How do dandies answer the five worldview questions? We will relate this to Channel 4's *Big Brother* entertainment and modern celebrity themes. Many people today are followers of Beau Brummell. Like Hetty Green, Beau is very 'secular', but whereas Hetty's god was the economic, Beau's god was the aesthetic. Idolatry always takes good things and perverts them.
- 12. Elizabeth Fry.** Fry's work in prisons is a powerful way of explaining the difference between individual and structural sin. A murderer commits sin, but the prison which incarcerates him may also be bound up in structural sin. People who have murdered should be punished and prevented from re-offending, but boys who steal a few shillings should not be transported to Botany Bay. The gospel does not only challenge individuals to follow Christ – institutions can be redeemed too. We contrast Fry's worldview with that of Elle Woods, the heroine of the Hollywood film *Legally Blonde*.
- 13. King Pomare the Second.** This story about a Tahitian king helps us to understand the dark side of paganism and shows how the Just War principle can be redemptive. When Tahitians saw the gospel at work after the battle of Feii (1815), they became hungry for God and there were many conversions. Preaching the gospel became much easier when the gospel was incarnated among them. We include some basic teaching about Just War theory.
- 14. James Chalmers.** This story about a plucky Scottish missionary focuses upon cannibalism in Papua New Guinea. Should we love our neighbours or eat them? We investigate the worldviews of western people who are unable to condemn the cannibal lifestyle and put the spotlight on cultural relativism, existentialism, emotivism and social Darwinism. These secular mindsets can be explained in a simple way without using long words.
- 15. Catherine Booth.** This story shows how missionaries set up a just and merciful match factory in the East End of London. Booth's story illustrates a striking similarity between pagan and secular idolatry. We always end up devaluing and depreciating some people's lives. For some cannibals the next-door-neighbour tribe can be consumed. For hardened consumerists some people can be consumed by brutal regimes of production. Biblical

teaching rejects both these forms of idolatry. Again, effective mission comes when the gospel is incarnated in both word and deed.

- 16. Owen Carey Jones.** Owen writes screenplays as his vocation. This story focuses upon the need for Christians to shape culture. If we don't do this, culture will become increasingly secularised or paganised. Owen's film making is a full-time, *bona fide* calling. Art is not propaganda and great films should never be didactic. Great art suggests without stating. We will spend time considering how films shape our horizons of happiness and possibility. How would James Bond answer the five worldview questions?
- 17. Peter and Miranda Harris.** This story focuses upon ecology and environmental sustainability. The *A Rocha* Christian communities around the world are doing wonderful things to bring healing to people and the earth. The need to develop Christian communities in different spheres of life is highlighted. We tell a story about the great Russian novelist Dostoyevski who experienced the world as the 'theatre of God's glory'.
- 18. Bob Lavelle.** This story illustrates the possibility of a Christian community which is not a church – a godly bank serving God and neighbour. Bob's bank is challenging both consumerism and a dualistic form of Christianity. It is vital to distinguish between the Body of Christ and the local church. Lavelle's bank, Booth's match factory, *A Rocha* and *Urban Saints* are all Christian communities, but they are not churches. We will also explore the incredible and inspiring work of *Christians against Poverty* which was voted Best Small Company 2008 by readers of the *Sunday Times*.
- 19. Thomas Baker.** This is a story which deals with forgiveness in modern day Fiji, against the backdrop of a pagan, cannibal past. There are some delightfully quirky and comical elements to the story. We will show how this story is connected to the caribou story and revival in Fiji which has led to 'nature' miracles – fish returning in abundance and poisoned ponds being miraculously healed.
- 20. Jerry McAuley.** This story, which focuses on rat-pits, crime and a dramatic conversion, is a powerful reminder that God calls us to turn away from false gods and false messiahs. The story is full of humour as we explore how rats can participate in God's kingdom. Let's not worship rats but rather see how we can partner with them (clearing land mines?) in order to see God's kingdom breaking through.

The entire Story Course costs £40 and can be purchased by emailing mark@realitybites.org.uk. With about 70,000 words and twenty slide presentations, there is enough material for a year with most groups. You can preview a course unit at <http://web.energize.uk.net/general/21> and read a review at: <http://schoolswork.co.uk/thinking/reality-bites-course/>. You can also request a free sample unit.

For more information or to buy the course, please contact Mark Roques:

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Who are we?

MARK ROQUES BA, MPhil, PGCE, director of RealityBites, is a lively storyteller (see www.markroques.com) who speaks at conferences in the UK and overseas. He taught philosophy and RE for many years and is the author of *Curriculum Unmasked: Towards a Christian understanding of education*; *The Good, The Bad and The Misled: True stories reflecting different world views for use in secondary religious education* and *Fields of God: Football and the Kingdom of God*.

RealityBites is the national training ministry of WYSOCS (The West Yorkshire School of Christian Studies). Our passion is to help youthworkers and schoolsworkers to become confident disciples who can engage with young people in a mature way that is dynamic, imaginative and relevant. www.realitybites.org.uk

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