

## Notes About the Literature

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God communicates by words. By His words He created the world. “In the beginning was the Word” (namely, Jesus; John 1:1), and that Word became flesh (John 1:14).

God created people in His image, so He gave us the ability to communicate through words also. We are above the animals, which communicate in a limited way with sounds and motions and scent. We use words to teach, inspire, convict, and recall. With words we keep records, codify laws, and tell stories. Some stories are longer; we call them books. The words of books nourish us, teach us, convict us, entertain us.

There is only one perfect book; we call it the Bible. It is valuable “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Other books have a degree of value to us, depending on our worldview and the content of the book. Some books do a great job of uplift, inspiration, or information. Others on balance merely take up our time and space in our heart and brain. Some fill our minds with negative words, or bad words, or even untrue words. Between these two extremes is the spectrum of books from mostly bad with a little good to mostly good with a little bad.

How do you tell the difference? Can you profit from a book that has some problems? Can you benefit from a book that has a little bad language? Is there value to an imperfect book? I’ll answer that question with a question: Can you benefit from—is there

value to—an imperfect person? Absolutely. In fact, except for Jesus, there is no other kind of person around, including you and me. There is no other kind of person from whom we can benefit.

Reading literature requires discernment. Some books are absolutely wonderful and worth reading over and over. Some have some merit. Some books are not worth the time it takes to read them. Some are dangerous. Books are like cuts of meat: some have lots of lean meat with a little fat and bone, while other cuts have a little meat (how did they get into the market?) and lots of gristle. Why bother with the gristle when there are so many meaty books available?

We have chosen the literature for *Exploring World Geography*—and for every Notgrass curriculum—carefully. Bethany, our chief literature finder, says she has to kiss a lot of toads to find a prince of a book, one that has value and one that we think homeschooled high school students should read and can profit from.

And yet, none is perfect. Working through these imperfect books, finding the meat and dismissing the bones, is called discernment. It’s a skill students will need in many aspects of life: dealing with people, deciding which one of them to marry, facing difficult decisions, choosing between comparably unpleasant alternatives, and investing their money. All of these situations are difficult to some degree since most things are a combination of good and bad.

We believe the books we recommend weigh heavily on the good side. This is not a defense for choosing questionable books simply because they are in the literary canon or because high school students are expected to read them and, after all, kids have to grow up sometime. We cherish your children’s hearts and minds, and we want to protect them from words that would be hard for them

to unread. The parts of these books we think you would want to know about, treating you as we would want to be treated, we point out below.

So we hope your students will read, enjoy, grow, profit, and discern. Our prayer is that these books will serve them well.

The page numbers listed here are from the editions of these books that Notgrass History sells.

### ***Know Why You Believe***

Little discusses scientific evidence that the universe had a definite beginning. He hails this evidence as support for the existence of God and confirmation of the Biblical account of Creation. Little uses the term “Big Bang” within the account of the beginning of the universe, but in conjunction with God as Creator (pages 39-42 and 154-156).

In a discussion of miracles, Little mentions that some have suggested that the Red Sea may have parted for the Israelites on account of naturally occurring wind conditions. He asserts that this may be possible, yet maintains that even so, the timing was miraculous. The Bible states clearly in Exodus 14:15-30 that God parted the Red Sea as a miraculous deliverance from the pursuing Egyptians (pages 128-129).

Little discusses differing views among Christians as to the age of the earth. You may disagree with some of his assertions. Nonetheless, this brief section is a useful springboard for discussing with your student how to understand the age of the earth and how to interpret both Biblical and natural evidence (pages 158-159).

### ***Blood Brothers***

Chacour describes violence against Palestinian citizens (pages 44-45).

He describes his experience while a young boy of accidentally discovering hastily-buried bodies while playing soccer with his friends. (pages 53-54)

There is one use of “d---” (page 197)

Chacour describes a horrific massacre at Palestinian refugee camps (pages 221-222).

### ***Patricia St. John Tells Her Own Story***

St. John refers (without intended disrespect) to a “coloured gentleman” (page 20).

Describing the safety of her hometown, St. John says, “. . . I doubt if either I or my parents had ever heard the word, ‘rapist’ . . .” (page 52).

St. John describes the Lord’s protection over the children in her charge when a “sex maniac” was attacking people in the town. She briefly mentions that he had committed rape (pages 66-67).

St. John describes the hippies that came to Morocco in the 1960s. She mentions that they abused drugs and that “the girls often became pregnant” (page 170-171).

Discussing discouragement and setbacks among missionaries during her years in Morocco, St. John mentions, “One of our number committed suicide” (page 172).

St. John refers to things happening “miraculously” and to witnessing a healing by prayer (page 236). She also recounts a time in Spain when she felt as though she was given the “gift of tongues” (page 213, a statement she made perhaps tongue in cheek, pardon the expression). Numerous missionaries who have served in cultures other than our own report that things have happened we don’t normally encounter in ours. We should not close our minds to God working in different ways among people who have worldviews that are different from our own.

St. John describes the origins of an orphan care ministry in Uganda. Hundreds of

children were orphaned when their parents were massacred by soldiers (page 250).

St. John briefly mentions a children's home for babies given up by their young mothers enslaved in prostitution in Bombay, India (page 252).

St. John describes a ministry for Romanian orphans found "locked away and forgotten in orphanages . . . the results of . . . policy of forcing women to have unwanted pregnancies to increase the nation's future work force and to produce children they could not afford to feed" (page 253).

St. John relates a story about a young friend with whom she studied the Bible. He once joyfully reported to her, "Just had a narrow escape; slipped on the ice and bumped my head. Almost took the name of my God in vain, but just managed to turn it into Gosh!" (page 260)

### *A Long Walk to Water*

The author briefly mentions a legend about the Atout people returning to earth as lions after death (page 31).

Salva and the group he's traveling with come upon people who have died of dehydration (pages 55-56). Walking away, Salva imagines vultures stripping away their flesh (page 59).

Salva sees his uncle shot (page 63).

Soldiers force refugees out of a refugee camp and toward a river. Many are killed by the soldiers' guns, drowning, and crocodiles in the river (pages 77-79).

The author occasionally uses the word "lucky" or describes a character believing he or she might be "lucky" (pages 2, 3, 33, 34, 79).

### *The Day the World Stopped Turning*

The narrator briefly discusses the painter Vincent Van Gogh. It includes a mention that he cut off his own ear, and, "In the end, he had been driven to suicide" (page 17).

Kezia says that much of what happens in our lives is "pure chance" (pages 46-47).

Saint Sarah, "patron saint of gypsies," is mentioned several times in the book. The Roma family has an icon of her in their caravan. Kezia prays to her and refers to her as looking after their family and others (pages 163, 235-236, 241, 251, 258, 263, 283).

After agreeing to keep a secret, Kezia's mother tells her, "But not telling is not lying, not quite" (page 176).

"Bloody" used as an expletive (page 230).

Referring to Vincent Van Gogh, the narrator says, "He had sought friendship all of his life, and died from the lack of it" (page 284).

### *Kidnapped*

Characters in the book frequently drink alcoholic beverages as a matter of course.

"Dod" used as an expletive (pages 18, 21, and 130).

While he's captive on board a ship beset by a storm, David says, "The thought of deliverance, even by death in the deep sea, was welcome to me" (page 41).

David describes a person as, "He was a tall man, strongly made and very black . . ." This refers not to race but to a dark complexion and hair (page 50).

David thinks to himself, "I could only see myself slaving alongside of negroes in the tobacco fields" (page 54).

David includes a description of a violent fight on board the ship, involving swords and guns, causing fatalities (most of chapter 10).

There is a use of "d---ed" (page 73).

The word “asses” is used, referring to the animal (page 101).

Alan claims that a drink of brandy had “been a good friend” to David, i.e, given him courage (page 142).

David says, “No sooner had I taken out the dram [of brandy] than I felt hugely better . . .” (pages 165-166).

“Young ass” refers to a foolish young man (page 212).

Another use of “d---ed” (page 221).

### ***Lost in the Barrens***

The narrator several times refers to Awasin in pronoun form as “the Indian boy;” this is not intended as disrespectful.

Alphonse quotes the proverb, “When the dog pup and the fox cub play together, the gods are pleased” (page 7).

Denikazi calls on “ancient gods” for help finding the deer (pages 26-27).

Denikazi refers to “the devil Wendigo” (page 31).

There is a brief reference to a legend of “the spirit Wendigo” (page 32).

The narrator makes a reference to hills “built by glaciers.” Jamie, referring to signs that land was at once time underwater says, “Thousands, maybe a million years ago, this must have been one huge ocean” (page 99).

The narrator describes a land formation including the phrase, “many more thousands of years” (page 104).

Awasin refers to a god-figure, “My people would say Manitou was with us” (page 105).

A reference to luck (page 116).

Use of “darn” (page 117 and 119).

Reference to wolverines as devils (page 124).

Use of “lucky” and “darn” (page 128).

Awasin and Jamie have an argument because of different beliefs regarding “robbing the dead” and the existence of “ghosts and devils.” Mention of the belief that the dead

use things in the next world. Jamie lies about visiting a campsite (pages 133-134).

Regarding some useful items Jamie had found beside a grave, the narrator says, “The dead out on that lonely, wind-swept ridge were friendly spirits. They had made gifts to the living of another race, across a century of time” (page 136).

“The heck with it” (page 141).

Awasin says there is no difference between wolves killing a fawn and humans killing a dozen does (page 146).

“Lucky” (page 149).

“Another, older world than ours” (page 156).

Regarding the dangers of the far northern region, Awasin says, “If you fight against the spirits of the north you will always lose. Obey their laws and they’ll look after you” (page 173).

“Devils or men might own this igloo” (page 176).

“Darn” (page 187).

Reference to a woman’s “ample bosom” (page 190).

### ***Boys Without Names***

Gopal thinks about his friend’s father that committed suicide because he could not pay his debt and worries that his father will do the same (pages 12-13).

Gopal carries a book about the life of Buddha (page 17).

Gopal thinks, “Before I left our village, I thought the stars might change our luck in Mumbai . . .” (page 47).

Gopal prays to “Lord Ganesh” (page 74).

Gopal mentions the belief that sharing food blesses it. Scar thinks Gopal might have evil power (page 136).

Gopal says that he prays, “Come on, wind” (page 143).

Gopal says that Scar might fear that he can give an evil look (page 190).

A reference to luck (page 193).

Gopal refers to “the manmade lake and the god-made hills” (page 198).

Gopal recalls legends, traditions, and memories regarding pagan deities (pages 216-217).

Gopal refers to a “good karma” (good deed), which is part of Hinduism (page 236).

Gopal refers to “Goddess Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth” (page 267).

Gopal mentions that it is “Kali Chaudash night, which bring evil spirits out . . .” (page 284).

Scar swears in a vicious manner (page 290).

### ***Revolution is Not a Dinner Party***

Ling explains that she gets new clothes for her birthday because, according to her Mother, “it was important so evil spirits would not recognize me in the coming year” (page 71).

Ling’s father saves a man from drowning. Apparently he was trying to commit suicide because he was wanted by the government (pages 129-131).

Ling finds a rope under her mother’s mattress like the one used in a recent suicide (page 148).

Ling is worried that her mother is contemplating suicide. Meanwhile, a doctor who lives near them is humiliated by the government, and she is found to have committed suicide. The doctor’s mother and two sons are cruelly beaten (pages 151-160).

“My mouth let out all the bad words I knew” (page 152).

A young worker curses at a jeep (page 164).

Ling sees the man who attacked and arrested her father attacked much later. She wonders if he will die from his wounds and thinks, “I would not be sorry if that happened. It had been seventeen months since they

took Father away, but it still felt as recent as yesterday” (page 187).

Missing her Father, while sitting by the river where she used to go with him, Ling muses, “Where was Father? Was it painful to drown oneself? When a person dies, does the spirit go to paradise? . . . No, no! I chased that thought away. I wanted to wear a red dress, eat ice cream, and walk on a green lawn. I wanted to live, to live for the day I could go to the Golden Gate Bridge with Father. But was he still alive? My eyes stung. I squeezed them shut” (page 188).

After a boy at school had threatened her repeatedly, Ling threatens to harm him, then thinks to herself, “What I really wanted was to put him in a coffin next to Mao [who had recently died]” (page 219).

“Pain spread through my body as I kicked and cursed” (page 231).

In the “Historical Background” section at the end of the book, the author says, “China is still a Communist country, but perhaps in name only” (page 248). This is wishful thinking. She acknowledges that “the government is still a powerful dictatorship,” but notes free-market trends and closer ties with the rest of the world. However, the Chinese Communist Party still has tight control over the country. China’s citizens do not have freedom of speech, press, or religion. Repressive measures by the government against Hong Kong, the Uyghur people, and Christians leave no question that the government is still a Communist totalitarian system and not just in name only. You might want to discuss this with your child.

We do not recommend the sample chapter of *A Banquet for Hungry Ghosts* by the same author included at the end of *Revolution is Not a Dinner Party*. It is a “ghost story” that involves cannibalism.

## *Ann Judson: A Missionary Life for Burma*

The book contains large excerpts from Adoniram and Ann Judson's letters and journals, as well as primary sources from people they knew. Though the Judsons and many colleagues gave their lives to bring the good news of the gospel to the Burmese people, an assumption of slight inferiority and "otherness" comes through from time to time in their words. They use words like "savage" and "uncouth," which bespeak a condescending outlook. When they use the word "heathen," they most likely meant simply to refer to people who did not know the Lord.

Ann witnesses a vicious beating of a slave (page 69).

Ann described the horrific execution as punishment for thieves (page 90).

As professed in her own words, Ann felt that the death of her firstborn son was an "affliction" and a "rod" given to them by the Lord because "their hearts were bound up in this child." The concept of interpreting suffering as a direct punishment from the Lord for specific reasons is a difficult and complicated topic you may wish to discuss with your student (pages 100-102).

A fellow missionary was leaving Burma because of serious ill-health. On his departing voyage, he threw himself overboard and drowned (page 116).

Adoniram writes in a confusing way about "making up my mind to have my right arm amputated, and my right eye extracted . . ." He is referring to the decision he and Ann were making about her leaving Burma for health reasons (page 139).

While being moved from one prison to another, Adoniram was made to cross a river in great physical pain. Ann wrote of this later, ". . . he ardently longed to throw himself into water to be free from misery. But the

sin attached to such an act alone prevented" (page 208).

Adoniram Judson's third wife, Emily, recorded some of the memories he shared with her. In a description of Adoniram first returning home from prison, she wrote demeaningly, "The first object which met his eye was a fat, half-naked Burman woman . . ." Emily also referred to the "sheer animality on the face" of this same woman (page 220).

In a speech, Ann referred to America as, "the country favored by Heaven above most others" (page 255).

## *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*

We do not find the introduction or afterword of this edition to be helpful, so they are not assigned as part of the literature reading.

The narrator is describing some of the medicinal herbs raised by Mrs. Todd. "Some of these might once have belonged to sacred and mystic rites, and have had some occult knowledge handed with them down the centuries; but now they pertained only to humble compounds brewed at intervals with molasses or vinegar or spirits in a small caldron on Mrs. Todd's kitchen stove" (page 4).

Reference to Charles Darwin's autobiography (page 10).

"For God's sake . . ." (page 23).

Use of "Lord" (page 24).

People converse briefly about various legends tied to a certain island, one including a ghost (page 63).

A character refers to "painted savages" she saw in the South Sea islands (page 63-64).

A woman punishes herself with a life of solitude because she had "thoughts so wicked towards God that I can't expect ever to be forgiven" (page 76).

Use of "Lord" (page 160).

Mrs. Todd tells a story that includes men becoming drunk, which she describes as “wasn’t in no go-to-meetin’ condition” and “three sheets in the wind” (page 165).

Mrs. Todd refers to “colored folks” (page 165).

In a story from many years previous, Mrs. Todd relates that her uncle, in a time of stress, “begun to mix me a very small portion out of the jug . . . I took it to please him . . . and I did feel better for it” (page 184).

Further on in the same story from many years previous, Mrs. Todd tells about when she was tending a dying person and they both briefly saw a person in the room, which the dying person said was her deceased mother (pages 190-191).

Mrs. Todd refers to “wild Nature” as “she” (page 203).

The narrator says of Mrs. Todd, “Life was very strong in her, as if some force of Nature were personified in this simple-hearted woman and gave her cousinship to the ancient deities” (page 204).

Mrs. Todd says, “There ain’t any slave but has some freedom” (page 206). This should not be taken to downplay the evil of slavery.

### ***Tales from Silver Lands***

This is a book of folk legends that contain many mythical creatures, in animal and human form, with powers to do good and evil.

The narrator describes condescendingly the indigenous people who lived in the region of Cape Horn (page 35).

Reference to “white witcheries” (page 87).

The narrator refers to “worthy and simple folk” (page 121).

Referring to a story-teller, the narrator says, “Then he went on to tell of other witches

that he knew, saying that there were many who were not all bad, but like men, were a mixture” (page 137).

The narrator twice refers oddly to the danger to “Christians” when passing through the woods of monkeys throwing nuts and branches at their heads. His meaning in using this term is unclear (pages 170, 187).

“Tale That Cost a Dollar” begins and ends with references to luck and cigarettes.

### ***Alternate Literature Titles***

These books are alternatives to some of the titles we recommend. We have not noted passages that parents might want to be aware of in these books.

*Memories Before and After the Sound of Music* by Agathe von Trapp. This autobiography tells the real-life story of the Von Trapp family, made famous in *The Sound of Music*.

*Red Scarf Girl* by Ji-li Jiang. This is very similar to *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*. It is a true story set during the Cultural Revolution in Communist China.

*Endurance* by Alfred Lansing. This tells the full story of Ernest Shackleton’s voyage to Antarctica on the *Endurance*, which is the subject of Lesson 74 in this curriculum.

*Through Gates of Splendor* by Elisabeth Eliot. This is the account of Jim Eliot (the author’s husband) and other members of the mission team who lost their lives attempting to reach an unreached people group in Ecuador with the gospel.

*A Passion for the Impossible* by Miriam Rockness. This is the biography of Lillian Trotter, a nineteenth century missionary to Algeria.

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**We hope that using this curriculum will be a positive experience for you and your student.**

**May God bless and guide you in it. Thank you for choosing *Exploring World Geography!***

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