

Lessons for Literature – Autobiographies
Born Again by Charles Colson
Through Gates of Splendor by Elizabeth Elliott

How to Use this Lesson Plan with Students:

1. Have your student read one of the biographies (*Born Again* or *Through Gates of Splendor*).
2. Have your student respond to the book in some creative way - book cover, poem, artwork, character sketch, etc.
3. Share the response with someone - parent, friend, grandparent, student.
4. Use the suggested lesson plan below for further discussion.
5. Activities listed are for groups or classes.
6. Get your student's feedback and make appropriate alterations for future book studies.

An example of a response written thirteen years ago by one of my high school students follows – she is currently an attorney for in Washington, D.C.

I decided to do a kind of follow-up on what happened after the events of this book, and how Chuck Colson's experience in Maxwell Prison evolved into a worldwide prison ministry.

Born Again shows how Chuck Colson went from 'political dirty tricks' to becoming a born again Christian (hence the title, Born Again). Colson was Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon when he got into trouble.

He and his associates began leaking private information and sometimes false statements to the press about opposing candidates and politicians. He was not specifically involved in Watergate, but suspicions stacked up against Charles Colson, who began to be referred to as the White House Hatchet Man.

One evening, after reading C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity and studying his Bible, he became a Christian. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested for participation in the Watergate burglary - even though he was not guilty. To appease the prosecutors, and possibly shorten his prison sentence, Colson pled guilty to obstruction of justice in another matter, which he had committed. Unfortunately, the judge was not favorable to Colson and gave him a sentence of one to three years.

Mr. Colson was horrified by the awful crimes committed within the prison walls. He was released after seven months after which he determined to improve the criminal justice system.

In 1976, shortly after publishing Born Again, he founded Prison Fellowship Ministries - the world's largest ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners, crime victims, and their families. In 1983, he established Justice Fellowship - a national criminal justice reform group. In 1991, Colson began Break Point, a national daily radio broadcast providing a Christian worldview for everyday issues.

He received many awards and authored over twenty-two national bestselling books. An interesting fact about Charles Colson was that he donated all the proceeds of his speaking engagements to Prison Fellowship Ministries and only accepted a ministry executive salary. Charles Colson is a powerful speaker, and his ministry has touched thousands for Christ.

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Questions for Discussion:

Literary terms to review: **Protagonist** = the main character; **Conflict** = the obstacle the main character faces in meeting his/her goal (the conflict can take place outside or inside the main character); **Antagonist** = a person with whom the main character has conflict; **Climax** = highest point of conflict in the story - typically the beginning of the resolution.

1. This month you've read about Christians who were challenged to sacrifice and/or suffer for the choices they made. Who was the protagonist in the book you read?
2. How did knowing this was a real person change the way you felt about the story?
3. Who was the antagonist in the story you read?
4. What were some of the conflicts the protagonist faced? Give examples. (Jim Elliott and Charles Colson both faced external conflicts, can you identify some of the internal or spiritual conflicts they faced?)
5. When did the climax take place in your book?
6. How did the conflict get resolved? (These situations are sometimes difficult to identify, nevertheless, they usually exist. It takes a critical eye to see them.)
7. Explain why you liked or disliked the book you read.
8. How does reading a biography like this one prepare you to deal with conflicts in your own life?
9. If you found yourself in the situation of the protagonist in the book you read, how would you have responded?
10. What are some external and/or internal conflicts you face today?

Activity Suggestion:

Read Psalms 46, 47, and 103

The psalmist says we must remember what the Lord has done in our lives and when we glorify him when we praise him for the things he has done. We have all faced difficulties, suffering, and conflict in our lives. We have either caused the suffering by our choices (as did Charles Colson), or we were the victim (as Jim Elliott and the missionaries in Ecuador).

The psalmist cries out to God about his present trouble, but also reflects on how God has delivered him in the past. This strengthens his confidence in the faithfulness of God and gives him hope.

Today, each of us is going to try writing a psalm to God. Think of a time he delivered you when you could not see a way out of a situation, healed you when you were desperately sick, or simply overwhelmed you with his love when you didn't deserve it.

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Then write a psalm to God to praise him for his love and faithfulness. Try to think in terms of past, present and future when you praise him. Nothing is insignificant when we see God at work in our lives - don't be embarrassed to share even the simplest events in your life. (For example, I asked God to give me an idea for this activity this morning during my devotion, and he answered my prayer.)

In ten minutes we will share the psalms we've written. God will be glorified and we will in turn encourage one another.

Below is a psalm one of my high school students wrote:

Anger fills my mind, hatefulness takes over my heart. Words, slicing through joy. My weapon is found in cruelty. But You fill me with joy. I understand my fault. Why do you give me friends? I am not worthy of gifts. Rich in material things, poor in godly gifts. What did I do for You? Yet You love me. You let me live abundantly. Thank you for gifted life.