

Reading Biblical Literature With the Heavyhearted

The ideological orientation and self-understanding of the reader affect the reading of the text. Certain textual topoi, such as despair, anxiety, depression, or violence, may trigger responses in readers who are well acquainted with matters of mental well-being. Whereas readers of biblical literature are faced with literary expressions of extreme mental and physical anguish, narrative characters with death wishes (i.e. Jonah, Elijah, Jeremiah, and Job), characters who commit suicide (Abimelech son of Gideon, Samson, Saul, Saul's armor-bearer, Ahithphel, Zimri, and Judas), and writers who face life's challenges (Paul and John), these typically do not affect the interpretive process. However, when teaching adolescents and populations at risk for mental health issues, these literary expressions can lead to closer readings of the text that inform the larger learning community. In this presentation, I will present some sample readings that will demonstrate the value of reading in community. Take aways will include suggestions for meaningful classroom dialogue, ways to affirm the worth of those in the mental health community, and pedagogical approaches to reading texts in new ways that connect with today's students.