

Story

Story is one of the most ancient and elemental forms of knowing. In the West, beginning in the 17th century, story as a way of knowing was eclipsed by the technique of knowing that we call science. After the rise of science, story came to be considered inferior or premodern, somehow backward. Stories were fit only for children, the illiterate and the uneducated.

Every epistemological change leaves behind a way of knowing that is less useful than the new view. The idea that stories as a way of knowing must be left behind has been discredited in our time. Our thesis is that story is not a frill, not an ornament, not an illustration, not a diversion, not an entertainment and certainly not backward. Instead, it is a unique way of knowing, as valid as science though entirely different in its usefulness.

Two primary ways of using stories were outlined by Jean LeClerq in his description of the differences between monastic and scholastic uses of scripture in the twelfth century. The monastic approach, known as lectio divina, or holy reading, emphasized the act of reading as an act of meditation and prayer. The reader came to the text to seek an intuitive understanding, to grow in wisdom, to savor the aesthetic value of the words and, ultimately, to encounter God. This monastic approach to stories is similar to the way we begin in Godly Play.

The scholastic approach, on the other hand, emphasized the act of reading as an act of questioning and testing. The reader came to the text to seek logical understanding, to grow in knowledge and to analyze the written text for ideas and theories. This process is also of enormous value – but of less relevance if our aim is to grow in relationship with God.

Still, as children approach their teens, this more analytical approach develops in Godly Play, too, to sharpen the children's critical thinking. Too often these analytical skills develop without a deep grounding in the monastic approach, which rests on an appropriation of the oral tradition, known with the body. In Godly Play, we see the integrations and appropriate use of these two ways of knowing in each presentation.

Information from *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: Volume 1: How to Lead Godly Play Lessons* by Jerome W. Berryman, pgs. 21-22