

Literature is meant to provide a perspective on life. Phrases or quotes found in works of literature may be used to help express one's own thoughts, to describe a particular situation, or even to apply the circumstances in another piece of literature. Readers often utilize literary quotes for this purpose, yet not every reader will interpret a given quote the same way. One example of a phrase which can have many different meanings is the biblical quote "The sins of the father visit upon the children."

A literal interpretation of the above quote would mean the wrongdoings of the father somehow affects the children. If the "bad habits" of one generation aren't corrected, they will be passed on to the generations that follow. That can result in generations of drug abusers, spouse abusers, or just rude people. One example of this interpretation might be if a father is a drug abuser, the children will learn from him, and use drugs also. Another example is if the father is abusive, the children will think that is how problems are solved. They, in turn, will be abusive to their families, and will start a vicious cycle for generations to come. These examples definitely show how this biblical quote may be interpreted literally.

"The sins of the father visit upon the children" has a deeper meaning than that described above. For example, "father" could be changed to "parent," and these "parents" could mean "generations" that precede the children. A situation that would represent that would be war or pollution. A second example which illustrates how this quote may be interpreted on a more global level is preceding generations could affect the children by means of racial discrimination that has been passed down from long ago. This may have started with slavery and segregation. Then, as generations follow, racial discrimination is passed. All of these situations prove that one quote may have many different meanings.

A third way to interpret this biblical quote is to change the word "sins" to a more general or positive term such as "behaviors", "expectations", "experiences", or even "good deeds". By making such a substitution, the quote takes on a new meaning. This makes the biblical quote good or bad depending on the "behaviors". For example, the father may behave in a polite way, which would teach the children behaviors that make many

friends, get job offers, and basically get the most out of life. On the other hand, the fathers behaviors could be rude, and the children would learn to be mean, which would cause them to lose their jobs and friends. Another situation which illustrates this new idea is if the father has experienced many important ways to tackle every day conflicts, he can teach the children easier ways to work out problems, to do school work, and teach the right ways to talk to people and get what you want, such as talking your way into a job offer, or a higher job rank.

While changing the focus of the original quote does add new meaning, the idea that the deeds of one generation affect those who follow, is still apparent.

The quote "the sins of the father visit upon the children", certainly applies to the circumstances of the Greek drama Antigone. In this drama, the core conflict is a result of a curse on Oedipus when he kills his father. This conflict demonstrates man vs. the laws of the state. This is the conflict that hurts following generations. Antigone wants to marry her brother, but where she lives it is against Creon's laws. Other problems which exist in Antigone are also caused by actions of a father or "father figure". One such situation is when Creon wants to punish Antigone to death even though his son, Haimon, is to marry her. It is easy to see how this biblical quote pertains, in particular, to the circumstances in the Greek drama Antigone. The above examples also show that one can use quotes from one piece of literature to help understand and clarify the actions and events in another.

Literature does imitate real life, and phrases found in literary works can successfully describe life experiences. The phrase "The sins of the father visit upon the children" can be interpreted in many different ways depending on how you look at different words, or how you apply them to real life or literature. You can take word "father" literally, or take it as a word that means parent. "Father" can even mean generations of families. It just depends on the context of the situation.

